

BODY BEAUTIFUL

By

Leigh Curran

"BODY BEAUTIFUL" is a play about love, aging and loyalty. It takes place in New York City and Salinas, CA between 2010-2013.

It can be performed with or without an intermission.

CHARACTERS:

MAN/MARCO: A 31-year-old, Mexican-American garage mechanic living in Salinas, CA who is easily upset when he can't find the words to say what he means.

EMMA LEWIS – A 70-year-old upbeat, big-boned body worker who, much to her frustration, is frequently mistaken for a man.

THAYER THACHER – A clean cut, 70-year-old, WASP-y looking, gay psychotherapist living in New York City who has a hard time making up his mind.

NOEL – A 56-year-old Mexican-American, trans man at odds with the consequences he has endured and the sacrifices he has made to become himself.

Dedicated to:

David Greenan

whose wise council
compassionate heart,
treasured companionship
and deteriorating right hip
inspired this play

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SCENE ONE-A

TIME: October, 2010

PLACE: A Confessional (SL) in Salinas, CA and a Meditation Room (SR) in Los Angeles, CA

LIGHT CUE: Light Specials SL and SR - Up

AT RISE: A 31-year-old Mexican-American man (SL) in well-worn jeans and work boots, lowers himself to his knees as EMMA, an upbeat body worker living in LA (SR) sits on a meditation cushion and, with eyes open in a soft stare, begins to chant:

EMMA

May Basic Goodness dawn
May the Confidence of Goodness
 be Eternal
May Goodness be all Victorious
May that Goodness bring
Profound, Brilliant Glory

MAN

Bless me, Father for I have sinned.
It's been ... uh, I can't remember
since my last confession. I want
to be a better Christian, you know?
My girlfriend, Angie, tries to, uh,
help me. I don't know what I'd do
without her.

(EMMA meditates (eyes open) as MAN clears throat)

MAN

Which is why I'm here, Father. I messed up, see. Bad. If I
could take it back I would but there's no way. I was uh,
thinking maybe a few Hail Marys. Or the Rosary.

(Pause)

Or uh, what about the Stations of the Cross? I used to like them
when I was an altar boy.

(Listening)

It's kind of a long story. You good for time?

EMMA

(smelling a burning smell)

Jesus, Mary and Joseph! The oven! Chicken - burning - sorry!

(EMMA rises, puts her hands on her hipbones and bows
quickly as the MAN makes the sign of the cross)

MAN

God help me.

LIGHT CUE: Light Specials SL and SR - Out

SCENE ONE

TIME: April, 2010 - Early evening in New York City
 April, 2010 - Late afternoon in Los Angeles, CA

PLACE: An Apartment in New York City
 A Backyard in Los Angeles

LIGHT CUE: Lights Up

AT RISE: EMMA and THAYER are standing on either side of the stage. THAYER is a clean-cut, WASP-y looking psychotherapist who lives in New York City. EMMA and THAYER are on their cellphones – but not talking to EACH OTHER.

THAYER

... and after we saw "Hedwig" I wanted to talk about it over a quiet dinner but as soon as we sat down you whipped out your cell and started texting!

(Listening)

THAYER

You're a fabulous man with a terrific family and friends - you've accomplished a lot in a short time but your fascination with social media scares the bejeezus out of me. What's so important it can't wait until we've had a thoughtful conversation about a shared experience?

(Listening)

EMMA

... but you always say you'll pay me back then you conveniently "forget" and, sorry, but I don't like having to remind you. I know I've said this before but it's beyond beyond embarrassing! You're a grown woman who raised a really great kid practically on your own - you do important work in the world but your fascination with debt scares the bejeezus out of me.

(Listening)

EMMA

Maybe if you'd made an effort to pay me back even if it was a dollar a month - but you couldn't even do that so I've ended up feeling ripped off on the one hand and selfish on the other because I'd rather put money aside for my old age than save you from yourself. And, while you've never said as much - I can feel your disapproval.

(Listening)

THAYER

We're a couple, Armando – we should be more interested in each other than our Facebook friends. Call me old fashioned ...

(Listening)

THAYER

I'm through talking about couple's therapy.

THAYER

I'm through being reminded that therapy might be harder for you because I'm a couple's therapist.

THAYER

And I'm through being your excuse for not going into therapy when you're the one who equates love with rejection.

(Listening)

THAYER

I understand.

(Listening)

I understand.

(Listening)

I understand.

And that's all I do is understand and I'm through understanding. Understand?

(EMMA and THAYER look at their cellphones as their callers hang up. EMMA and THAYER dial a number and face EACH OTHER. Into cellphones:)

THAYER

He hung up.

EMMA

There's this expectation that because we're a couple, my money is your money – maybe if you'd made an effort to meet me half way ... gone to Debtors Anonymous – maybe I'd feel – I don't know – Safe! ... but, guess what? You didn't and I don't.

EMMA

I'm through being your credit card.

EMMA

I'm through being reminded I remind you of your father.

EMMA

And I'm through being your excuse for not going into therapy when you're the one who equates love with money.

(Listening)

I understand.

(Listening)

I understand.

(Listening)

I understand.

And that's all I do is understand and I'm through understanding. Understand?

EMMA

She hung up.

(THEY start laughing like naughty children)

THAYER
What did you say?

EMMA
The truth.

THAYER
Me, too.

EMMA
It felt good, didn't it?

THAYER
I should've done it a long time ago.

EMMA
Me, too. Whoo hoo!
(Silence)
You still there?

THAYER
Sure. Sure, sure.

EMMA
Tell me.

THAYER
It doesn't matter.

EMMA
Your hip?

THAYER
I'm being a baby.

EMMA
Are you having it replaced?

THAYER
Next week.

EMMA
That's a good thing, Thayer - it's been making you old and creaky
before your time.

THAYER
I don't know why I thought things would turn out differently.

EMMA
You'll be back on your feet in a flash.

THAYER
No, I mean with ... my ...

EMMA

Ex?

THAYER

Armando ... yes ...

EMMA

Because we believe the people we fall in love with are like us ... only they don't know it yet – so we hold out hope. But, when you think about it, hope is nothing more than energy that your body experiences as a feeling and your brain puts into words that idealize eternal happiness.

(Pause)

Whatever I just said.

(Pause)

Anyway, when you and I were married – before you came clean about being gay ... I hoped you'd tell me what was haunting you so I could "understand" because then you'd fall in love with me all over again for the sheer size of my compassion and never want to be anything else again but Us.

(Silence)

Thayer? Did I lose you?

THAYER

Hope ... yes. Right. Us. Sorry. I was just thinking ... maybe I jumped the gun. It wasn't all bad with Armando. We traveled really well together – enjoyed cooking, theatre ... Plus he's so savvy – I can turn on my stereo from anywhere in the apartment now – with my iPhone. I have no idea how he did that. And it doesn't hurt he's a nurse. Or that he comes from a great, big welcoming family. In many ways I'll miss them most.

EMMA

Devora's family is nuts in a dilapidated splendor sort of way. Getting help is beneath them. Better to have a cocktail. Devora knew she'd never go to Debtors Anonymous – she wouldn't've been able to withstand her mother's disapproval. So she turned me into a penny pinching bad guy. And you know what? I was ... I had to be. It's not like I have a family to fall back on.

THAYER

You have me, Emma – I hope you know that – you'll always have me.

EMMA

Okay.

(Pause)

THAYER

Truth is ... I'm kind of ... scared.

EMMA

I'm not.

THAYER

Armando and I were really good companions.

EMMA

But you wanted more – and you should have it – you’re a good man who – through a series of events – not all of your own making, by the way – and, I know you don’t like blaming your parents but they were dedicated alcoholics – is drawn to younger men with an aversion to intimacy. That’s what you should really be scared of.

THAYER

I honestly believed we’d become intimate as I aged.

EMMA

Did Armando?

THAYER

We never talked about it. I didn’t want to scare him. I just ... what you said ... the “thing with feathers”

EMMA

What thing with feathers?

THAYER

Hoped.

EMMA

Oh, right.

(Pause)

When Devora and I met she was earning six figures. I thought we’d share things equally then she decided to quit her job – make a Pilgrimage to Ireland to discover her roots. And she isn’t even Irish. She’s dyslexic – so maybe ... I don’t know ... Anyway, when she got home she decided to become a Drought Specialist – remember? And no sooner had she secured her first client than she got cancer and, by the time she was on her feet again, she’d spent all her money. What could I do but come to her rescue? I mean, we were a couple – that’s what couples do for each other, isn’t it? And you know the worst part? She never said Thank You. Doesn’t believe in it. That should’ve been my first clue. You warned me.

THAYER

Well, I guess that’s that.

EMMA

What?

THAYER

The end of falling in love.

EMMA

Thayer, you don’t get to say that – you’re only 70.

THAYER

And gay.

EMMA

I remember.

THAYER

Old gay men are Undesirable, Em, with a capitol 'U'. You should see the dating websites. There's no future in young studs - we all know it. And, sadly, that's the attraction.

(Pause)

I would've liked to have experienced true love - I really would've. I see it in some of my clients - even when the going gets rough there's a deep friendship ... a shared respect for whatever it was that brought them together in the first place.

EMMA

We had that.

THAYER

Yes, we did - and if you were a man we'd still be married.

EMMA

So it's all my fault?

THAYER

Exactly.

EMMA

I'm going to love living alone again. I've always been good at it. Probably too good.

THAYER

But what about when you're old and creaky and can't take care of yourself anymore?

EMMA

Let's go some place we've never been. Let's go to JFK and LAX right now and meet up in ... Tulum?

THAYER

My hip.

EMMA

India. We'll meet up in India - you can get your hip replaced there. I have a friend who did it and she's as good as new.

(Pause)

I thought you'd be happy - you know, moving on.

THAYER

It's not so much that - it's ... After the surgery I won't be able to bend over or shop for food or walk my dog for at least a month.

EMMA

You got a dog?

THAYER

My neighbor rescued a puppy but it turned out her son was allergic. Armando was going to help me take care of her ... At

THAYER (CONT)

least she's house broken.

EMMA

You did the right thing with Armando. Neither one of us liked who we were becoming.

THAYER

I probably should've waited.

EMMA

Now stop that!

THAYER

I let you talk me into it.

EMMA

Because you're under my spell.

THAYER

Always have been - from the first time I saw you in Psych Class wearing jeans with hand-sewn patches in strategic places. So sexy and sooo sixties.

EMMA

Well, what about your blue and white checked Brooks Brothers shirt-slash-uniform? Soooo establishment.

THAYER

God ... Who were we?

EMMA

Two lucky kids with the world at our feet.

THAYER

Not anymore ...

EMMA

What if I take care of you?

THAYER

No ... I couldn't ask you to come all the way from LA -

EMMA

Yes, you could - and, in your own round about, hang dog sort of way you just did.

THAYER

I like it when you call me on my bullshit.

EMMA

Bullshit!

(THAYER laughs)

LIGHT CUE: Lights Out

SCENE TWO-A

TIME: October, 2010 – Moments Later

PLACE: A Confessional in Salinas, CA

AT RISE: MAN is holding onto his knees.

LIGHT CUE: Light Special SL - Up

MAN

... so I had another beer, right? Chased it down with a shot of Tequila with the, you know ... worm in the bottle. It was the fifth anniversary of my brother being, uh, killed in Afghanistan - not that I needed another excuse to get pissed - but that was a good one - so good when I get to my girlfriend's apartment I, uh, break up with her 'cause when I asked her to marry me she needs to "think about it" and when I ask her why she, you know, clams up. Then I go to my dad's and as soon as I walk in the door, he's on my case about how I should call my mother 'cause it's the anniversary of my brother's death, right? Get this: My mother divorces my dad and he still stands up for her. Weak. So I tell my dad: No! - the way I tell him every year. And he says Jesus said to turn the other cheek. And I say: Fuck Jesus! He turns on the TV and I feel bad I said that so I call my girlfriend - tell her I, uh, didn't mean to break up - but she doesn't pick up. And I just know she's watching my name light up her cell and, uh, wishing I was dead. I don't sleep much and the next morning I'm late - one of my customers is waiting for his tractor - tapping his foot like, uh: Where you been, Asshole? I come this close to telling him to get another mechanic when my Pit Bull brings me his ball. I throw it and joke that at least he looks up to me, right? Then I get the guy his tractor even though he, uh, you know - still thinks I'm an asshole.

LIGHT CUE: Light Special SL - Out

SCENE TWO

TIME: May, 2010

PLACE: Thayer's rambling Upper Westside apartment - New York City

LIGHT CUE: Lights Up

AT RISE: THAYER is sitting in a chair - a cane between his legs. EMMA is backing out of a door talking to something inside.

EMMA

Stay. Good dog. No. Sit.

(more insistent)

Sit! Gooood giiiirl. Stay. Now I'm going to close the door but I'll be right here. You'll be fine.

(Closes door with difficulty)

You need to get some WD40 for that doorknob.

SOUND CUE: Puppy whimpering

(EMMA and THAYER hold still. THAYER can't stand the whimpering - tries to get to his feet. EMMA motions him to be quiet. Silence)

SOUND CUE: Puppy whimpering - OUT

EMMA (CONT)

(whispering)

Dogs are so smart, Thayer. She already knows you're a big softie. You need to nip that in the bud - let her know who's in charge.

THAYER

(whispering)

I was hoping you'd be.

EMMA

Well, that's fine for now but what happens when I go back to LA? It's all about intention. Yours. Hers is easy. She wants to please. When Anson was a puppy this dog walker told me dogs think in pictures - it's no different with Poppy. You imagine her getting under your feet - she picks up that thought and does her best to make it come true. It's not malicious - it's all part of being loving and loyal ... and a dog.

THAYER

Anson used to get under my feet too, remember?

EMMA

But that was different - we were in our 20s and you weren't in recovery from hip replacement surgery.

(THAYER plants his cane firmly on floor and starts to get up)

THAYER

Shall we dance?

(EMMA takes THAYER's arm and THEY begin to walk around the room)

How many laps this time, Nursie?

EMMA

Two with the cane.

(Silence – THEY continue walking)

THAYER

I spend an awful lot of time thinking about death these days ...
Do you?

EMMA

I guess. I mean, everybody I know has either done it or is getting ready. But it doesn't scare me if that's what you mean.

THAYER

It's the "left behind" part ... the world without people you've been close to for 40-50 years.

EMMA

I just pretend we haven't talked in a while.

THAYER

I guess ... Don't you go getting any bright ideas!

EMMA

I'm healthy as a horse! I suppose you know the derivations of that expression.

THAYER

Not sure I do.

EMMA

You mean I've finally stumped you?

SOUND CUE: Dog whimpers

(THAYER looks toward the "dog door")

EMMA (CONT)

Let her cry or she'll whine whenever you leave and you don't want a dog with separation anxiety – really hard on the neighbors.

THAYER

Point taken.

(Pause)

I don't know why I took her on. Probably because she's a distraction from all this aging business. So many of my patients are struggling with their careers. Whether or not to have children. Having children. And some days all their problems seem so young.

EMMA

Do you ever think about retiring?

THAYER

All the time. Then a patient has a breakthrough and it seems worthwhile all over again.

SOUND CUE: Timer rings

EMMA

That would be the sweet potatoes.

(letting go of THAYER's arm)

Can you manage?

(THAYER lifts up his cane and takes a few steps)

THAYER

Watch me.

(EMMA gives HIM thumbs up and exits into kitchen)

EMMA (OS)

(yelling from kitchen)

So what is it about death that scares you?

THAYER

(yelling back)

Facing it alone.

EMMA (OS)

(yelling)

I just hope mine is peaceful. Like a sunset.

THAYER

(yelling)

But a really spectacular sunset, right?

EMMA (OS)

(yelling)

So spectacular there will be no need for obituaries.

THAYER

(yelling)

We should write them, you know? So we're properly represented when the time comes. You could write mine and I could write yours - we could compare notes.

EMMA (OS)

(yelling)

Where do you keep your measuring cup?

THAYER

(yelling)

Over the stove - bottom shelf on right. And re-fill the Brita pitcher, will you?

EMMA (OS)

(yelling)
Done and done-er.

SOUND CUE: Dog whimpers

(THAYER looks at "dog door" – approaches it carefully)

THAYER

(whispering)
I'm under strict orders to leave you be.

SOUND CUE: Dog whimpers and scratches door

THAYER (CONT)

(still whispering)
So listen carefully. I'm going to impart a truism for your delectation. Shush.

SOUND CUE: Dog whimpering and scratching OUT

THAYER (CONT)

You will be tested upon your release.

SOUND CUE: Dog whimpers intermittently – winding down

THAYER (CONT)

"Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside a dog it's too dark to read."

SOUND CUE: Dog whimpering OUT

(Silence)

THAYER (CONT)

I thought that would get your attention. You can thank the estimable Groucho Marx. Remember his name. The test will be multiple choice.

(EMMA, still (OS) in the kitchen, starts hum/singing 'Why Was I Born?' to herself as SHE assembles dinner. THAYER listens to HER. Hum/singing is an old and endearing habit)

I love having you here, Em.

EMMA (OS)

(yelling)
Did you say something?

THAYER

(yelling)
I love having you here!

(EMMA briefly appears in doorway)

EMMA

You do?

THAYER

We live together well.

(EMMA exits into kitchen)

EMMA (OS)

(yelling)

Like old shoes. Who write each other's obituaries.

(Silence. THAYER puts down his cane, gets a candle and walks it to the table as EMMA re-enters from the kitchen carrying two placemats, napkins and silver)

Look at you!

THAYER

(patting his gut)

When I'm done with rehab I'm going to take up Pilates.

(EMMA pulls out a chair – motions THAYER to sit)

Famous last words ...

(THAYER turns away. HE forgot:)

Matches.

EMMA

Pretty soon you won't need me anymore!

THAYER

Fat chance.

(EMMA sets the table as THAYER looks for the matches)

EMMA

You know – the death thing ... I didn't mean to be flippant about it when I said I pretend I haven't talked to whoever has just died in a while – in fact, secretly I think it will be kind of nice to be ... well, done. I mean – I love being alive but I'm also ...

(THAYER continues looking for matches as EMMA exits into kitchen – yells:)

We're so lucky, Thayer – we do what we love ... we have great friends ... we're healthy ...

(EMMA re-enters with two glasses)

I should want to live ... and I do – but not all the time – and I don't mean that in a suicidal way ... more like ... a ... wondering.

(EMMA exits into kitchen – yells:)

A kind of curiosity to ... get on with it. Skip over the dwindling part.

(Silence. EMMA re-enters with matches – hands them to THAYER)

Wow, I haven't thought about suicide since ... since you and I broke up.

THAYER

Are you telling me I drove you to it?

(THAYER lights the candles)

EMMA

I couldn't stop hating you. Then I couldn't stop hating myself for hating you. And for having the arrogance to think my spiritual shit was so together I could take the fast track to forgiveness. Eventually I realized the way wasn't Around but Through so I returned full force to the delicious drama in my gut: hating you – hating me – hating my body.

(Pause)

Once I even beat myself up.

THAYER

I was there.

EMMA

You were?

(Pause)

Oh, you were.

THAYER

Scared the bejeezus out of me.

EMMA

Scared me, too. I mean, I'd been a massage therapist for – what? – ten years? ... so you'd think ... but I'd lost all respect – not for my clients ...

(Pause)

Anyway, sorry.

(EMMA exits into kitchen)

THAYER

(yelling)

The last thing I wanted to do was hurt you, Em.

EMMA (OS)

(yelling)

You were between a rock and a hard place.

THAYER

(yelling)

But still ... it felt so -

EMMA (OS)

(yelling)

- cruel?

THAYER

(to himself)

Yes ... cruel.

(EMMA re-enters with a pitcher of water. Puts it on the table.)

EMMA

Never again.

THAYER

Never ever again.

(THEY pinkie swear then hug - long and deep)

EMMA

(still hugging)

The strangest part for me was realizing how much I blamed my body. It was too big, too loud, too flat chested, too not-what-you-wanted-anymore.

(The hug ends. THAYER sits)

But now ... it's like ... this is going to sound weird but we talk to each other - my body and I. Like best friends.

(THAYER pats his gut)

THAYER

My body talks to me, too! It says: Let's eat Death by Chocolate and never stop.

EMMA

Shut up.

THAYER

Sorry - inappropriate.

EMMA

I was having a moment.

THAYER

Continue.

EMMA

Not if you're going to make light of it.

THAYER

I apologized.

EMMA

Alright ... fine.

(Pause)

THAYER

And I'm genuinely interested in your relationship to your new best friend.

(EMMA puts the water pitcher and glasses in front of THAYER)

EMMA

Make yourself useful.

THAYER

Seriously - I am.

(EMMA exits into kitchen)

EMMA (OS)

(yelling)

I know you think it's bullshit.

THAYER

(yelling)

Not entirely.

EMMA (OS)

(yelling)

But your body is your ally if you'd only believe me. It's how you come in contact with your — I know you don't like the word Soul — so, okay — with your core.

THAYER

(yelling)

So what's my body telling me with this hip replacement business?

(EMMA re-enters with a bowl of sweet potatoes)

EMMA

I'm not psychic. I just had an experience that changed the way my body and I interact and I'm passing it on to you to in hopes that —

THAYER

- you can convert me.

EMMA

Never mind.

(EMMA exits into kitchen)

THAYER

(yelling)

What if — instead of my hip deteriorating slowly I'd fallen and broken it? And my cell was ... high up — say ... on the shelf above the kitchen counter. And my only options were to 1: lie there until somebody came along with a key and I've broken up with him ... or 2: die.

(EMMA re-enters)

What would my body be saying to me then?

EMMA

I don't know. That you should've worn a MedicAlert bracelet? Why are you being so ...

(EMMA stabs a sweet potato with a fork and dumps it on THAYER's plate. SHE pulls out her chair, sits, spreads her napkin in her lap — pushes the salad bowl in THAYER's direction, avoiding his eyes)

Salad and sweet potatoes. I didn't have time to stop at Zabar's.

THAYER

What if we took care of each other?

EMMA

Aren't we? Maybe not right at this moment but, generally speaking, aren't we?

THAYER

No ... I mean what if we lived together again. Helped each other through our old age.

EMMA

Here or in LA?

THAYER

You pick.

EMMA

No. It has to be mutual 'cause on down the road — you know how you are ...

THAYER

How?

EMMA

Around big decisions. You get all slippery and before I know it you'll convince yourself this was all my idea.

THAYER

Em, we're coming to the end of our lives on this planet. Can't we be there for each other?

EMMA

As long as you remember this is your idea.

THAYER

One hundred percent.

(Pause)

EMMA

So here or in LA?

THAYER

We'll flip a coin.

EMMA

Seriously?

(THAYER takes a quarter out of his pocket)

THAYER

Seriously.

EMMA

I don't know, Thayer — you're living on the edge.

THAYER

And, apparently, I have my body to thank for it.

LIGHT CUE: Lights Out

SCENE THREE-A

TIME: October, 2010 - Moments Later

PLACE: A Confessional in Salinas, CA

LIGHT CUE: Light Special SL - Up

AT RISE: MAN is still confessing

MAN

My brother and I were tight, you know? When I wanted to shoot hoops instead of doing homework he reminded me how hard our parents worked so we could like go to good schools – get into, uh, decent colleges. My brother said the way he thanked them was to make them proud. Me, not so much. Quit college after my freshman year. Went to work for my grandfather and when he retired took over his garage. My mother was disappointed but by then she, uh, wasn't around anymore so ... who cares?

(Pause)

Now it's just me and my dog and my dad in the house where I grew up. Except when I stay with, uh, Angie ... Or maybe "stayed" is more like it.

(Pause)

But don't get me wrong, Father. Everything was good when my brother and I were kids. My parents took us to church every Sunday, made sure we had plenty to eat, didn't fight – at least, we never heard them – so life was like normal. I even thought about becoming a priest. Seriously. Then we graduated high school and nothing made sense after that. Not God. Not, uh – what's the word? – respect. Not the truth.

LIGHT CUE: Light Special SL - Out

SCENE THREE

TIME: July, 2010 – New York City
October, 2010 – Salinas, CA

PLACE: THAYER's office in New York City and Confessional in Salinas, CA

AT RISE: MAN is still in confessional. NOEL is sitting nervously before THAYER. Long silence.

LIGHT CUE: Lights Up on Thayer's Office

NOEL

As I said over the phone – I have only been in therapy once – as a formality. I prefer to figure things out on my own.

(Silence)

THAYER

What changed?

(NOEL takes a letter out of his wallet. It's been carefully folded nine times and has clearly been in his wallet for a while. HE hands it to THAYER who doesn't take it)

I'd rather you tell me in your own words.

NOEL

One of my sons was in Afghanistan. This is from his twin brother. No greeting. Nothing. Understandable. The last time he saw me I was a woman.

(HE begins unfolding the letter. THAYER watches him with curiosity)

Oh, my mother was superstitious. She believed if you fold a letter nine times, put it in a glove and put that under your pillow you will dream the answer.

THAYER

Did it work?

NOEL

It has been in my wallet for two years. And I am here. So ... no.

(HE looks at the floor, embarrassed. Then at THAYER and then at the letter. Reading:)

Polo is –

(to THAYER)

Polo is my son. His real name is Paulo but when he was eight he started calling himself Polo because his brother – who he adored – is Marco. Polo liked making people laugh. Even at his own expense.

(NOEL smoothes the letter on his thigh. Nervous silence)

So ... uh ...

(reading)

NOEL (CONT)

Polo is ... dead. Killed by friendly fire somewhere in Afghanistan. That's all we know.

LIGHT CUE: Light Special SL - Up

NOEL & MAN/MARCO

I hope you're proud of yourself. Polo looked up to you but when you decided your husband and sons weren't good enough for you he started drinking. Heavily. You were his best friend ... unless ...

(NOEL clears his throat - collects himself)

NOEL

... unless you were pretending about that, too.

(NOEL looks at THAYER for help)

Shall I go on?

THAYER

Yes, please. I know it's painful but it's helping me get to know you better.

NOEL

(reading)

His drinking got so bad in college he started picking fights. He thought the Army would be a good place to straighten out.

MAN/MARCO

He didn't really want to join but he needed to do something constructive to escape the humiliation you caused our family when you became a man.

NOEL

(to THAYER)

I waited until the boys were grown to tell them. Even to tell my husband. He is Mexican but not macho. We raised the boys more modern than that. Or we tried to. We were close-knit, see - so eventually I thought ... we would ... but ...

(Silence - then reading:)

You could've talked him out of going into the military if you'd stayed our mother.

MAN/MARCO

He valued your opinions. Always showed you respect. But you had to become "yourself." And now his death is on you. Not on the guy who blew him up. It was dark. He had an excuse.

NOEL

Don't bother writing back. I'm only sending this because apá asked me to.

MAN/MARCO

This is the last time you'll hear from me. Marco.

LIGHT CUE: Light Special SL - Out

(NOEL starts folding the letter – the last words practically memorized)

NOEL

PS: You're not the only one who is suffering.

(Silence. NOEL returns the letter to his wallet)
I have never read it out loud before. Not even to myself.

THAYER

What are you experiencing?

NOEL

I don't know.

(Pause)

Sadness.

(Pause)

Shame?

(Pause)

THAYER

Anything else?

(Pause)

NOEL

I have been thinking about killing myself again.

THAYER

You say "again."

NOEL

I came close when I was Noelia.

(Pause)

Around the time my breasts started to develop. I was almost eleven. I got a razor from my mother's sewing kit. Held it to my wrist. Thought about my parents finding me. Blood everywhere. I was their only daughter.

(smiling wryly)

My mother was already planning my Quinceañera.

THAYER

With your help?

NOEL

She tried to get me interested but I was into playing soccer with my older brothers. I had four of them. We went everywhere together from as soon as I could walk. It never occurred to me I wasn't a boy. But when I started getting breasts everything changed. My brothers started making fun of me – asking me if I could see my toes. Stuff that made no sense. My dad had breasts that were bigger than mine and he could see his toes.

THAYER

What was that like for you?

NOEL

Confusing. But my dad made everything right. I would lie next to him under whatever tractor or truck he was fixing. Hold the flashlight. Hand him his wrench. We would talk about soccer - I would tell him when I grew up I was going to turn pro and he was going to be my coach. I knew more about fixing farm equipment and playing soccer than my brothers ever did. And I was not shy about letting them know it, either.

(Pause)

Then my mother left a bra on my bed. Like I was supposed to know what to do with it. My parents never talked to us about our bodies. When I got my period I thought I was bleeding to death.

THAYER

Sounds like you were really on your own.

NOEL

Well, I would have been if I had not overheard a classmate in the bathroom during recess complaining to her friend about cramps. So when I got home I asked my mother if it was true that all girls bleed. A little while later she told me I was becoming a young lady and that I had to stop rough housing with my brothers. She knew I would go running to my father so she brought him with her - and he sided with her. We had a big fight. My whole life was falling apart over a little blood. Finally we "compromised." I did not have to play soccer like a young lady ... but everything else ... No exceptions.

THAYER

How did you handle your Quinceañera?

NOEL

My brothers and I were raised to tell the truth - it was a very important part of growing up - so I said I wanted to wear a tux. My mother started crying - almost immediately - and my father freaked out which was not like him. In fact, he got so mad he freaked me out. So I put on a dress. Did what I was told - even though I felt like a liar.

(Pause)

Anyway, when Marco wrote about how Polo's death is on me because I left my family to become "myself" and he put "myself" in quotes ... He had no idea how long I had been holding on for dear life. None of them did.

THAYER

One of my favorite writers said: "There is a sense in which we are all each other's consequences."

(NOEL looks at THAYER quizzically)

NOEL

I know that author. Begins with an S.

THAYER

Wallace Stegner.

NOEL

Yes. "Angle of Repose." About the engineer and his artist wife.

THAYER

You're a reader.

NOEL

"I shall be ... " ... something, something ... sorrow.

THAYER

"I shall be richer all my life for this sorrow."

NOEL

Yes!

(Pause)

THAYER

Is that how it feels, Noel?

NOEL

You remember how the wife keeps adapting to the engineer thinking there is money to be made in mining? Often against her better judgment. But deep down she knows accepting him — all of him — is the making of her.

(Pause)

I want to love my son that much again even if I never see him.

(Pause)

Reading helps, right?

THAYER

How so?

NOEL

With the loneliness.

THAYER

I never thought of it that way but ...

(letting down his guard)

Yes. It's like a deep conversation with an old friend.

NOEL

Or a stranger.

THAYER

That, too.

(Pause)

NOEL

I'm reading "Love in the Time of Cholera?" again. Have you read it?

THAYER

When it first came out.

NOEL

I always wanted to know what it would be like to love another person for life - no matter what.

THAYER

But it was a romantic love.

NOEL

Well, Florentino was a romantic but by the time he was an old man his love for Fermina was the real deal. At least, I like to think so. It is as if he became even more attractive with age.

(Awkward Silence)

THAYER

(returning to therapist mode)

So ... we were talking about your Quinceañera.

NOEL

My father gave me away to my best friend, Carlos. I didn't know he was gay at the time, but looking back he was always getting bullied.

THAYER

And you?

NOEL

I was a really good soccer player so no one bothered me. Plus, everyone knew I had four big - and I mean Big - brothers.

THAYER

And after high school?

NOEL

I did not get recruited by a soccer scout because professional women's soccer did not exist. So I went to community college. Studied accounting. Got a job in a bank. Eventually met my husband and after a couple of miscarriages - had the twins.

THAYER

Tell me about the twins.

NOEL

They were all boy - from day one. I envied their cis certainty. And the more I envied them the more convinced I became that something was really wrong with me.

THAYER

I'd like to hear more about that.

NOEL

For a while I thought I was a lesbian who wasn't attracted to women. But that did not make any sense. So I did what I always did - pushed my feelings aside. But they came out anyway.

Mainly in remarks to my husband - usually when he touched me. It was all about how much he loved my body. I would say: What about me? And he would look at me like I was being ridiculous. So I would get aggressive - verbally. I knew how to shut him down. And I hated myself when I did. He was a kind man. We were good parents. That was when I loved him most. But one night we had a fight - I do not remember what it was about - just that I got so angry I raised my fist - like I was going to deck him. My husband spent the night on the living room couch. The next day he took the boys camping. When he rolled down the window to say goodbye, I was so full of shame I could barely look at him. I went to our bedroom to fold the laundry. Slipped my arms into the sleeves of one of his shirts. Pretended my arms were his arms - wrapped them around me. Then I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror and saw what I felt like inside for the first time. Just kept looking at ... At Noel. At me.

(Pause)

The next morning I had all my hair cut off. By my husband's barber.

(THAYER smiles. NOEL smiles back - shrugs)

My husband said I looked like a dyke. I burst into tears. Grew it back. Started going to the library to educate myself. That is when I fell in love with books. There were only one or two about homosexuality. And the word Transgender had barely arrived in the big cities. It would be a long time before it reached the farm belt in northern California.

(Pause)

I would like to be able to speak the truth without hurting anybody. I have never been able to do that. Have you?

(THAYER smiles)

So is that it? I unload and you smile mysteriously?

THAYER

What would you like to have happen?

NOEL

You have thoughtful eyes. I would like to hear what is behind them. I would like to know where you are coming from - otherwise, how can I trust what you say about me?

THAYER

Female intuition?

NOEL

I am pretty sure I gave that up for testosterone.

(Silence)

THAYER

I am thinking what a strong person you are. Admiring your courage.

NOEL

I am admiring your compassion.

THAYER

See you in two weeks.

NOEL

When I get my raise I will be able to come more often.

THAYER

Wonderful.

(THAYER sees NOEL to the door)

LIGHT CUE: Lights Out

SCENE FOUR

TIME: July, 2010

PLACE: THAYER's apartment – living room

LIGHT CUE: Lights Up

AT RISE: THAYER is sitting in an armchair listening to a book on tape.

TRANS BODIES, TRANS SELVES (VO)
As trans people, we may be gay, straight, bisexual, pansexual, or asexual. Our sexual preferences may depend on –

SOUND CUE: Doorbell rings

THAYER clicks off the recording, bounds to his feet and opens the front door.

THAYER

Emma!!

EMMA

(still holding her bags)

You aren't going to believe this – or maybe you will – I don't know anymore ... But on my way here three people called me Sir! One person every now and then okay – but three in one day? And one was the stewardess when she asked me if I wanted some toxic airline snack ... She should've known better – I mean, I'm wearing red studs ... and in both ears.

THAYER

(taking EMMA's bags)

Well, I'm glad to see you.

EMMA

(entering apartment)

Sorry. It's demoralizing that's all. My whole life I've wanted to be womanly – and here I am – heading into my 70s and I'm still being called Sir. Is it because I have big bones and a low voice? Because I have short hair and wear pants? I don't get it. Do you?

THAYER

People don't take the time to look at each other anymore.

EMMA

Once I was wearing dangly earrings – almost to my shoulders – standing in line for the Ladies Room when the woman behind me says: Excuse me but the Men's Room is over there. I kid you not!

THAYER

(pretending to text)

Millennials are the worst.

EMMA

You can't blame the Millennials. I've been mistaken for a man as far back as college.

(EMMA closes the front door behind HER)

Anyway, sorry for the rant. Other than that and an oversized man whose corpulence oozed over the armrest – it was a pretty uneventful flight.

THAYER

I straightened up the little room off the kitchen. You can put your massage table in there – if your clients don't mind using the service elevator.

EMMA

I've already booked three treatments – can you believe it?

(going to window)

And, sure – service elevator is fine.

(looking out window)

Still a beautiful view. Despite that ... glass ... pretentious-whatever-it-is high-rise tax write-off for the super rich who really live in Dubai.

(Pause)

Some of my LA clients have been with me for over 20 years. That was the hard part – harder than giving up my home.

THAYER

Are you having second thoughts?

EMMA

(massaging her hands)

No. Deep massages take their toll. And Rolfing ... don't get me started!! I've started focusing on Craniosacral work.

(mocking herself)

It's easier on my big, strong, manly body.

(THAYER puts his arm around EMMA)

THAYER

"She was a battered woman now, not a lovely girl; but she still had that something which fires the imagination, could still stop one's breath for a moment by a look or gesture that somehow revealed the meaning in common things."

EMMA

Oh, not the Quote Game. I just got here.

THAYER

I read it to you out loud.

EMMA

About 50 years ago!

THAYER

Willa Cather.

EMMA

Was she the one who wrote in bed?

THAYER

That was Edith Wharton.

EMMA

I'm no good at the Quote Game, Thayer - and I'll never be much of a reader so just get it over with!

THAYER

One more hint: "All the strong things of her heart came out in her body, that had been so tireless in serving generous emotions."

EMMA

The pioneer that you said reminded you of me? Begins with an A.

THAYER

"My Antonia."

EMMA

Yes! People probably called her Sir, too!

THAYER

Oh - I almost forgot! The Harrises invited us for dinner - 8 o'clock? Are you up for it?

EMMA

The Harrises? What did you tell them?

THAYER

That we're planning on sailing through our declining years in each other's company.

EMMA

And when Karen looks at me like: so-are-you-two-back-together? What do I say?

THAYER

Say ... yes. In our fashion.

EMMA

Really?

THAYER

Really.

(EMMA smiles at THAYER - lets her deeper love for him escape then catches HERSELF)

EMMA

Sorry.

THAYER

I never stopped loving you, Emma.

(Awkward Pause. EMMA picks up her massage table)

EMMA

Where's Poppy?

THAYER

With the dog walker.

EMMA

Fancy.

THAYER

I've started taking her to work with me. She wags her tail when my clients come in then curls up on her cushion. She's much calmer. What you said.

EMMA

She has purpose.

THAYER

Yes. Funny ...

EMMA

What?

THAYER

Oh, nothing ... Purpose ... and wondering what mine is now that -

EMMA

You're old and undesirable?

(THAYER takes the massage table from EMMA)

THAYER

Give me that.

(THEY start to exit)

EMMA

Ooooo - so manly.

LIGHT CUE: Lights Out

SCENE FIVE-A

TIME: October, 2010 – Moments Later

PLACE: A Confessional in Salinas, CA

LIGHT CUE: Light Special - Up

AT RISE: MARCO continues confessing

MARCO

So, like I said, as soon as I ask Angie to marry me she gets all ... what's the word? - like I give her the creeps. "We been together five years," I say, "and you have to, uh, think about it? Since when?" She doesn't answer but this time I push her so she says she doesn't, respect me. "The whole time we been together?" I ask. "What kinda lie you been living?" Finally she tells me she thinks I'm like weak 'cause I, uh, won't apologize to my mother for a letter I wrote when I was 22. Angie doesn't know my mother but she and my dad are tight. I don't like being ganged up on, right? - so I tell her: mind your own business. Then she gets in my face about, uh, forgiveness. "What if we had a queer kid?" she says, "Would you kick it out the house?"

(Pause)

I lose my words when she says shit like that, Father, so I tell her to go fuck herself and she tells me to get lost so I do - slam the door as I'm leaving and it feels so good I like slam it again. And again. And again. And I know she's thinking about her landlord who wants her out so he can raise the rent but when she tells me to keep it down I, uh, freak - grab her by the hair. I'm this close to slamming her face into the wall, right? - when I remember something from when she took me to Bible Study: "Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me." I let Angie go with a shove. Ram my fist through her window instead. That was all her landlord needed to, you know, kick her out.

(Pause)

It's like ... a danger, Father. A danger that, uh, takes over my body ... when I, uh ... lose my ... words.

LIGHT CUE: Light Special - Out

SCENE FIVE

TIME: September, 2010 - Mid-Morning

PLACE: EMMA's massage room in THAYER's apartment

LIGHT CUE: Lights Up

AT RISE: NOEL is sitting stiffly on the edge of EMMA's massage table. EMMA is sitting on a very large exercise ball.

NOEL

I only know you hold my head and there are mixed feelings about whether it works or not.

(EMMA laughs)

EMMA

You've been on the internet.

NOEL

Alternative medicine is new to me. It was between this and acupuncture.

EMMA

What made you decide on this?

NOEL

A friend of a friend told me how you helped her with neck pain. I played soccer when I was a kid. Injured my neck a couple of times. Nothing serious but I think it is catching up with me.

EMMA

How?

NOEL

Migraines mostly. I have tried medications, physical therapy, traction. They reduced the frequency but nothing makes them go away.

EMMA

The main thing with any healing alternative is to go toward the experience with a positive attitude.

NOEL

I understand.

EMMA

What medications are you taking?

NOEL

Uh ... Just ... uh Imitrex. As needed.

EMMA

Why don't you lie down? Head at that end.

NOEL

I keep my clothes on, correct?

EMMA

Correct. I'll be focusing on your skull. Holding it very gently – it almost feels as if I'm doing nothing. But, gradually, these small movements influence the pressure and circulatory rhythm of the cerebrospinal fluid that surrounds your brain and spinal cord.

(NOEL lies down on massage table. His body is rigid – clearly HE is outside his comfort zone. EMMA cleans her hands)

NOEL

What do you say to the people who think this is quackery?

(EMMA puts her hands under NOEL's head and cradles it gently)

EMMA

I combine it with massage and don't say anything. I do that for most people, actually. It's only recently I've begun practicing it by itself. People can think what they want about its efficacy. My goal is to help you sink into your body because deep psychological change goes hand in hand with deep physical connection. So, for a lot of people, this helps with that.

(Silence. NOEL begins to relax – catches himself)

NOEL

Like meditation?

EMMA

Exactly.

NOEL

I have heard that can be good for headaches, too.

EMMA

It's the kindest gift you can give yourself.

(Silence. EMMA continues cradling NOEL's head. SHE feels HIM starting to sink but something isn't right. NOEL catches himself again. Sleepily:)

NOEL

So you ... practice ... medi...tat...-?

EMMA

I do.

NOEL

... did it ... change ... your ...

EMMA

Life?

NOEL

... yeeees ...

EMMA

I didn't used to like myself very much. It really helped with that.

NOEL

Hmm hmm ...

(NOEL drifts off. EMMA scans NOEL's body with her eyes then with her right hand held about an inch above his clothing. SHE pauses over his genital area - her hand trembles ever so slightly. NOEL's eyes pop open. EMMA withdraws her hand - shakes it to stop the trembling)

EMMA

Would you mind if I put my hand on your sacrum?

NOEL

I am not sure I know where that is.

(EMMA points to the wedge shaped bone at the base of her spine)

Oh, uh ... uh ... I think I would mind.

EMMA

No worries.

(Silence. EMMA continues the treatment. NOEL keeps his eyes open)

When you were a boy did anything happen to you that was traumatic?

NOEL

I fell out of a tree once. Walked away without a scratch. Probably more traumatic in retrospect.

EMMA

But of a sexual nature?

(NOEL clears his throat)

NOEL

Not that I know of.

EMMA

Maybe it's just me.

NOEL

My family was very close.

EMMA

Are you still?

NOEL

You know how it is – kids grow up – parents die – life goes on.

EMMA

How many siblings?

NOEL

Four brothers.

EMMA

Did your mother miss not having a daughter?

(NOEL is silent. HE becomes convinced EMMA knows HE's hiding something)

NOEL

(clearing his throat)

Why do you ask?

EMMA

I don't know – I guess I would've been lonely – not all the time but ... maybe your mother had lots of woman friends. Or didn't care. Whatever ... I'll shut up now. I was just enjoying a big, fat, inappropriate projection.

(NOEL sits up sharply)

Are you alright?

NOEL

I ... uh, maybe ... I should ... I left my Imitrex at home.

EMMA

(confused)

Are you getting a migraine?

NOEL

I better go.

(NOEL takes his wallet out of his pocket)

Tell me what I owe you.

EMMA

Nothing ...

(NOEL puts down two 20s)

NOEL

That is all I have got. I can send you the rest. You have been very kind.

(NOEL heads for the door. EMMA extends her right hand and hands HIM his money)

EMMA

Noel, I don't want your money. I didn't mean to upset you. I was just imagining – it wasn't a criticism of your mother. I hope you didn't take it that way.

(NOEL nods his head and leaves without taking the money. EMMA holds the money in her right hand. Looks at it then at the massage table)

I'm such an idiot.

(EMMA's right hand starts trembling again. SHE drops the money on the floor and, hand still trembling, lights a stick of sage. She runs it in a circular motion around her body. She stubs out the sage in its ashtray. Looks at her hand as it stops shaking. SHE starts to change the sheet on the massage table. SHE hears a knock on the door, opens it and sees NOEL)

NOEL

(nervously)

I am not in the habit of talking about my body. I am sure you know what you are doing. It is not that. I lied about needing my Imitrex. I did not want you to think it was the treatment. Or what you said. I am not in the habit of lying. Especially to people I like. I take Testosterone ... as well as Imitrex.

(HE turns to leave – turns back)

And I ... uh, I have a vagina.

EMMA

Oh. Well ...

(EMMA smiles and shrugs)

So do I.

(Silence. NOEL starts to leave)

Noel ... wait. Just so you know ... when I was working on you I felt a lot of confusion. I had no intentions of touching you but I needed to understand the energy I was picking up – that's why I extended my hand. Then it started trembling – and I thought maybe your body needed a release of some sort and that I could help.

(Silence. EMMA motions NOEL to enter. HE stands awkwardly. EMMA rolls the exercise ball toward HIM)

Sit. Roll around. Go wild.

(NOEL sits on the ball uncertainly)

It won't hurt you.

(EMMA sits on massage table)

So ... you don't have to answer if you don't want to but ... have you had your ... breasts ... you know – what do you call it?

NOEL

Top surgery.

EMMA

Yes.

NOEL

About eight years ago.

EMMA

Was it helpful? Did it make you feel more ... like a man?

NOEL

When the psychologist okay-ed me for gender reassignment, I wanted to be sure my boys knew I was still their mother before I did anything irreversible. I was still binding and packing so no matter how good it felt to be called Sir – I was still a liar when I took off my clothes. I needed the boys to understand how that tore me up inside. They had had four years to get used to my transition. Marco was doing well running my father's garage and Polo was about to graduate from college. I knew my ex was taking Marco to Polo's graduation so I asked him to talk the boys into meeting me for dinner. I drove six hours and no one showed up. Not even my ex and I thought we were becoming friends. So as soon as I got back to the City I called the surgeon and scheduled the operation. My right breast came out perfect but the swelling in the left never subsided so even after a second surgery I ended up lopsided.

EMMA

That must have been devastating.

NOEL

I was angry at my sons when I had my top surgery. Did it out of defiance and got what I deserved.

EMMA

Are you always this hard on yourself?

NOEL

I should have waited until the boys had accepted me as Noel but I lost my patience – drove Polo into the army and the other into hatred. And now there is no turning back.

EMMA

Would you like to? Turn back?

NOEL

I do not know who I am anymore.

EMMA

Have you considered therapy?

NOEL

I started a couple of months ago. I like my therapist. We are working on why I feel as isolated as I did when I was a wife and mother. He thinks I should start dating. Gives me homework. This week I am to create my profile on a trans-dating site.

EMMA

And?

NOEL

I never liked dating when I was a girl. Some things never change and maybe that is a good thing.

(EMMA picks up her iPad)

EMMA
Tell me what it's called – the dating site.

NOEL
He did not say. That is part of my homework.

EMMA
(typing on iPad)
Okay ... I'm going to give you some names and you tell me which one feels right. No thinking! Ready?

NOEL
Not really.

EMMA
Try Yes ... just for the fun of it.

NOEL
Fine.
(NOEL shakes his head and rolls his eyes)
Yes.

EMMA
Trans Passions.

NOEL
Too fast and furious.

EMMA
TG Hookup.

NOEL
Too young and hip.

EMMA
TransSingle

NOEL
Too true.

EMMA
TS Mingle.

NOEL
(getting off ball)
Does it always have to be about sex? Isn't there a site where one can have a good old-fashioned conversation?

EMMA
About sex?

(NOEL laughs self-consciously – lightly rolls ball toward EMMA)

NOEL

You are no help!

EMMA

So how scared are you on a scale of one to ten?

NOEL

I feel self-conscious even thinking about dating.

(EMMA turns off iPad)

EMMA

You're right to be cautious about putting yourself out there because you're not ready – I don't care what your therapist says – you need to sit quietly with your body – the way you think it's a mess. The way you look in the mirror and feel shame. The way you feel like a liar. And the way you are perfect exactly as you are. What a concept, right? Meditation is all about allowing compassion – for yourself and others. You don't have to do anything but ride your breath.

(sitting on ball and patting the massage table)

Would you like to give it a whirl?

(NOEL hesitates)

You don't have to take your clothes off.

(NOEL sits on the massage table)

So lie down – eventually you will do this sitting up but for now let your body sink into the table ... and close your eyes.

(NOEL closes his eyes)

And when you're ready, become aware of your breathing.

(NOEL begins to relax)

And watch what comes up – feelings, ideas, memories ... and notice no matter what thought is taking your attention away from the breath – it keeps on flowing in, flowing out ...

(Pause)

Then notice how after it flows out there's a pause. See if you can rest in the spaciousness of that pause. Just you and it.

(Pause)

But what is it?

NOEL

(eyes still closed)

A reflex action?

EMMA

But what makes the reflex reflex? No matter how deeply we look into the human body eventually we reach a point of not knowing. So what is that?

NOEL

What do you think?

EMMA

It's what you think that matters.

NOEL

(opening eyes)

I just need a sense of where we're headed.

EMMA

Okay, but this is just me. First, I don't think we breathe – I think we are breathed – by the Life Force, God, Kundalini, Consciousness – whatever you want to call it.

NOEL

Okay.

EMMA

Which means every time we take a breath we have the physical experience of our essence – the part of us that goes on after we die.

NOEL

Like an Awareness?

EMMA

Yes! And meditation expands Awareness to the point where you realize Awareness is not inside you – you are inside Awareness.

NOEL

(sitting up)

I think I need to stop.

EMMA

Sorry. I can get carried away. Especially when I meet a fellow traveler. For now follow your breath – in, out, in, out and say to yourself: Behind my breath is the light of pure Consciousness. Do that for 5 minutes every day until the next time I see you.

LIGHT CUE: Lights Out

SCENE SIX-A

TIME: October, 2010

PLACE: A church pew (SL) in Salinas, CA and NOEL's Meditation Closet (SR) in New York City

LIGHT CUE: Light Specials SL and SR - Up

AT RISE: MARCO is on his knees holding a rosary and saying the Hail Mary without much thought. NOEL is on his meditation cushion trying to meditate with his eyes open. His body language communicates his restlessness.

MARCO

... Holy Mary, Mother of God pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

NOEL

Behind my breath ... uh ... is ... uh ...
 (losing patience with his wandering mind)
 Come on, Noel - focus!

(NOEL takes a deep breath as MARCO looks at his Rosary and sighs - HE has a long way to go)

MARCO

Hail Mary full of grace the lord is with thee ... blessed art Thou among women ... and, uh ...

NOEL

Behind my breath is the light of ... of Pure ... Consciousness.

MARCO

... and blessed is the fruit of thy womb ...

NOEL

All my thoughts and feelings arise out of Pure Consciousness.

MARCO

Fruit of thy womb? Did you, uh, hear that, Marco?

(NOEL sighs)

Holy shit! Jesus was a faggot!

NOEL

What if my thoughts arise out of Pure Bullshit?

MARCO

A faggot who was like blessed!

MARCO
I can't do this!

NOEL
I can't do this!

(MARCO and NOEL rise as one then head in separate directions)

LIGHT CUE: Light Specials SL and SR - Out

SCENE SIX

TIME: November, 2010

PLACE: THAYER's office

LIGHT CUE: Lights Up

AT RISE: THAYER looks at his watch. HE appears nervous and excited.

SOUND CUE: Watch Chimes

THAYER opens his office door and greets NOEL with an enthusiastic handshake.

THAYER

Good to see you.

(NOEL returns the enthusiasm)

NOEL

You, too!

(NOEL heads for the couch. THAYER has the impulse to put his hand on NOEL's back but stifles it. NOEL appears somewhat agitated but glad to be in THAYER's presence)

I have continued wrestling with the vagina issue since our last session. If I stop taking Testosterone, my beard and body hair will not go away and my voice will remain low so people will still see a trans man who cross-dresses as a woman, I guess.

(NOEL laughs, embarrassed. THAYER smiles. NOEL clears his throat)

So a penile prosthesis is the only way to go. Thanks for signing the paperwork.

(reluctantly)

My first appointment with the surgeon was yesterday.

THAYER

How did it –

NOEL

- make me feel?

THAYER

Yes.

NOEL

Fine.

(Pause)

Like a mess.

(Pause)

Fine and like a mess.

(THAYER smiles as NOEL tries to hold his emotions at bay)

THAYER

Can you describe the mess?

NOEL

Well, as you know, it has taken me eight years to save the money for my bottom surgery so I am not rushing into it defiantly the way I did with my breasts. But yesterday when I left the surgeon I was short of breath - had to sit down on the subway steps. I didn't care that it was rush hour. I turned toward the wall and tried to make myself invisible but a young woman asked me if I was all right and when I looked at her all I could think was how lucky she was to have a vagina. I think I might have even said that to her face. In any case, she was dialing 911 when I was able to stand again. All night I missed my sons. All night I thought of the surgeon altering ... uh ... altering my ... uh ...

(NOEL begins to tear up)

... my last remaining point of contact with my boys.

(THAYER hands NOEL a box of tissues)

Sorry. I did not think I would get so emotional.

THAYER

You have a lot to be emotional about.

NOEL

Am I having a nervous breakdown?

THAYER

There's a wonderful quote from Kahil Gibran's "The Prophet" - "Awareness is the beginning of change."

NOEL

But how aware do I have to become before I know what I want to do?

(NOEL stands, then sits then stands again)

THAYER

What's going on?

(NOEL sits)

NOEL

This morning when I was getting dressed I let myself look at my vagina. Really look at it. I wanted to move past holding onto it because of the boys. Then on my way here I picked up the mail and my son had answered my letter.

THAYER

I didn't realize you'd sent it.

NOEL

A week ago. I was not expecting such a quick response. Maybe I should delay my bottom surgery until Marco and I have had a

NOEL (CONT)

chance to ... until he understands what it is like to be stuck between two worlds. He is capable of understanding but he is not as quick as his brother which has always been a source of frustration for him.

(clears his throat)

And for me if I am being totally honest.

(getting letter out of back pocket)

Before I open it I want to thank you for suggesting I write down everything I have been feeling even if it made no sense – then cut the inflammatory stuff so Marco would have the room to ... respond without feeling -

(Pause)

I am obviously nervous about opening it. Ready?

(THAYER nods his head as NOEL opens envelope and unfolds a piece of letter paper. It is blank and tucked inside is NOEL's letter to MARCO torn in small pieces. NOEL looks at them in disbelief as they fall to the floor. Silence. NOEL kneels on the floor - picks up the pieces - tries to put them back together)

I want to at least read you what I wrote so you can see ... how ... how clearly I was ... able to ... express ...

THAYER

I can imagine, Noel.

NOEL

... and with love.

THAYER

Yes.

(THAYER gets down on his knees. Hands a piece of the letter to NOEL)

NOEL

I do not want your pity.

THAYER

Why do you think I pity you?

NOEL

Will you stop?!

(THAYER reaches for NOEL's hand. NOEL yanks his hand away)

I want you to tell me what you see. I don't care what I see! Why do you think I take off work to come here? Even when my boss gives me the side eye. So you can mind fuck me? I need to know things!

(THAYER stands up. NOEL throws the pieces of his letter to one side – draws his knees to his chest – buries his face. Silence. THAYER sits)

THAYER

I see a man who has every reason to hurt. And I can't begin to imagine how deeply.

(Pause)

NOEL

I should not have used the F word.

THAYER

Were I in your shoes I would be using it, too.

(Pause)

NOEL

Where is Poppy?

THAYER

Having a tooth extracted.

NOEL

That makes two of us. Only mine is without Novocain.

(Pause)

Do you meditate?

THAYER

I used to.

NOEL

Why did you stop?

THAYER

I'm not sure. I thought you were finding it helpful.

NOEL

At first, yes. But now ... I get distracted by things like ... like driving a knife through Marco's narrow mind - slowly - so he knows how badly it hurts to be judged for something I cannot change! I churn it over and over instead of focusing on the breath. Then I hate myself for hating him because I am better than that - or if I am not I should be - right?

(starts breaking down)

And do not ask me what I think.

(Silence)

THAYER

You are better than that.

NOEL

Fuck meditation! And fuck being ashamed of saying fuck!

(hitting his thigh)

Fuck it! And fuck me!!

(NOEL slaps his own face. THAYER sits beside HIM - takes his hands to stop HIM from injuring himself. NOEL frees one hand. Begins hitting THAYER)

NOEL (CONT)

And fuck you!!!

(THAYER wraps his arms around NOEL's arms. Holds him hard until HE begins to relax)

THAYER

Noel, change is hard.

NOEL

But what am I changing into?

(NOEL struggles)

What?

(THAYER lets go of NOEL)

Show me a future free of self-loathing? You can't, can you?

(NOEL sobs. THAYER puts his arm around NOEL's shoulders. NOEL leans into THAYER. Hugs THAYER. THAYER rubs his back, strokes his hair. Takes a handkerchief out of his back pocket and gives it to NOEL. NOEL takes the handkerchief without looking at THAYER and blows his nose. THEY sit awkwardly as NOEL's sobbing subsides. Gradually THAYER rises. Returns to his chair. Silence)

NOEL

Sorry.

(Silence)

THAYER

I have my own battles with self-loathing, Noel and, quite honestly, I wish I had your bravery.

NOEL

You are right about so many things – including your recommendation that I look into dating and when I did not feel ready – that I go to the gym. I have met some nice men there. I have asked one of them out. Not because I am attracted – more for practice.

(Pause)

And because you never know.

(Pause)

Maybe I will like him as much as I like you.

(Pause)

Inappropriate.

(THAYER looks away from NOEL – barely able to contain his feelings)

THAYER

"It was one of those humid days when the atmosphere gets confused. Sitting on the porch, you could feel it: the air wishing it was water."

NOEL

Jeffrey Eugenides?

THAYER

"Middlesex."

NOEL

I went into mourning when that book was over.

THAYER

You and me both.

LIGHT CUE: Lights Out

SCENE SEVEN-A

TIME: December, 2010

PLACE: At MARCO's garage in Salinas, CA

LIGHT CUE: Light Special SL - Up

AT RISE: MARCO is SL on his cell

MARCO

It's sick, Angie. Women with dicks?! Where in your precious Bible does it say it's okay for, uh, women to get dicks? Isn't it enough they don't need us to like make babies? And then there's the kids – six-year-olds going over to the opposite sex before they know what they want. I'm 31 and I don't know what I want. Except to get back with you.

(Pause)

Please.

(Listening)

Angie?

(Listening)

Then why did you call?

(Listening)

I don't want to see my mother with a beard, Angie. Or a dick! I don't care what you and Apá say about her being the same person she always was. The same person raised us not to lie then lied to us for our entire lives. And I should like apologize for, uh, tearing up her letter? She should apologize for sending it in the first place!

(Pause)

Why should I have read it? It wouldn't change her back – it wouldn't, uh ... bring Polo alive again.

(Listening)

He just listened. Told me to say 50 Hail Marys. I said about five when I realized Jesus was a Fruit! It's right there in The Bible – swear to God!

(Listening)

You don't know that – you weren't, uh ... alive in Bible days. Maybe that's where the expression started.

(Listening)

I left ... so?

(Listening)

Now! I was gonna tell you now! C'mon, Angie. I would never hit you. That's why I didn't, right? Why won't you let me make it up to you?

(Listening)

Some priest isn't going to make me forgive her, Angie. And neither will 1,000 Hail Marys. Wrong is wrong.

(Listening)

I have to be more tolerant? What about you? Hounding me and hounding me 'cause I, uh, don't do life the way you think I should.

(Listening)

MARCO (CONT)

You know when I'll grow up? When you can tell me why it's, uh, okay for God to be angry even though anger is like a sin. When you can tell me why, uh, "lying lips are an abomination" but it's okay for God to speak evil. There's nothing holy about The Bible, Angie. It was written by a bunch of, uh, storytellers who couldn't agree on the facts. Look at Adam and Eve – if they were the first humans how is it the rest of us aren't born of, what's the word? ... uh, incest?

(Pause)

I'm sorry, Angie. I tried.

(Listening)

Then I guess I'm just an angry, fucked-up sinner.

(Pause)

Angie?

(Throws phone to the ground)

LIGHT CUE: Light Special SL - Out

SCENE SEVEN

TIME: December, 2010 – Mid-Morning

PLACE: EMMA's Massage Room (SL) and THAYER's bathroom (SR)

LIGHT CUE: Lights Up

AT RISE: NOEL is face up under a sheet on EMMA's massage table. EMMA is working on his right foot.

NOEL

Oh, God – marry me!

(EMMA smiles)

EMMA

Feet take a lot of punishment.

NOEL

Yes, right there – oh, that's so ... sore. But good sore.

EMMA

It's the point that corresponds to your heart.

NOEL

Oh, that.

EMMA

You have a good heart, Noel and don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

NOEL

You are very sweet.

EMMA

What kind of word is "sweet?" Has testosterone made you sexist?

LIGHT CUE: Light Special SR - Up

(NOEL smiles and closes his eyes as EMMA focuses on massaging his left foot. THEY are silent as THAYER, in another part of the apartment, enters his bathroom – looks at himself in the mirror and shakes his head as if to say: You're an idiot. He puts shaving cream on his face and picks up his razor)

THAYER

(to his reflection)

I don't know where to begin. Do you?

(starts to draw the razor up his neck)

For the last two weeks, I've been thinking about something you said, Noel ...

(Pause)

Really I've been thinking about you.

THAYER (CONT)

(Pause – continues shaving)

And the nature of our relationship.

(stops shaving)

What relationship? You crossed a line. Jesus, Thayer. Call your supervisor.

(resumes shaving)

Why? I already know what he's going to say and he's right.

(Silence. THAYER continues shaving as:)

EMMA

(to NOEL)

How was your date with the guy from the gym?

NOEL

Speaking of my heart?

EMMA

And your liver – and your pancreas.

(NOEL smiles and shrugs)

NOEL

The restaurant was nice – intimate but not over the top. I do not normally drink but I had a margarita to fortify myself. We had a lot more in common than I thought we would so, when the time came to spill the beans, I was more nervous than I thought I would be.

(Silence. THAYER stops shaving – waves his razor at the mirror)

THAYER

And that's why I think we should have a chat ... No, too chatty.
(resumes shaving)

Are you familiar with the term Transference? It's when a patient attaches his or her feelings to the therapist. For example anger, sadness ... or falling in love. Have you?

(stops shaving)

Really, Thayer? "Have you?"

(resumes shaving)

I know – I'll cut to the chase. "How was your date?" If it went well it'll be easy to detach.

(stops shaving)

But then I'll have to listen to how in love he is with whoever that bozo is from the gym.

(THAYER finishes shaving, wipes lather off his face and checks his handiwork in the mirror. EMMA can't stand the suspense)

EMMA

So? Did you spill the beans?

NOEL

Right as I am about to have the trans discussion, the waiter serves two cappuccinos with hearts in the foam. My date pours so much sugar on top of his heart he basically smothers it – then he whips his spoon through the foam without giving the universal symbol for love a second thought. And I freeze.

EMMA

You are such a girl!

NOEL

(snapping his fingers)

As you were, woman!

(EMMA laughs - continues massaging NOEL's calf. NOEL relaxes. THAYER plucks the hairs in his nose)

THAYER

So, in addition to Transference there's also something called Countertransference which basically means my feelings for you are inappropriate and unprofessional. And if I were to act on them I could lose my license.

(Pause - continues plucking)

Too threatening. He'll wind up feeling my dilemma is his fault. His esteem is still somewhat fragile.

(THAYER splashes after-shave on his face and checks out his teeth)

NOEL

So I told him I thought he was a very nice man but that I had a crush on someone else.

EMMA

Really?

NOEL

Technically, I still told the truth – just not about my body.

EMMA

I didn't know you had a crush. Who is he?

NOEL

Unavailable.

EMMA

Oh.

NOEL

But at least he knows my story. And it doesn't seem to faze him.

EMMA

Then what? Is he married?

NOEL

Not that I know.

EMMA

So you're just assuming he's unavailable.

NOEL

Sometimes I just want to hold him. But I do not. Well, one time ... I got upset about my body. He sat beside me.

THAYER

Sometimes I just want to hold him. But I don't. Well, one time ... He got upset about his body. I sat beside him.

NOEL

Without judgement.

THAYER

He was in such despair he threw himself into my arms. He needed comfort. It was the humane thing to do. But after he calmed down I didn't want to let him go.

NOEL

He is not afraid to talk about the meaning of life.

THAYER

He's really well read.

NOEL

And his smile has soul. Plus he remembers the world before the internet.

THAYER

And his smile has soul. Plus he remembers the world before the internet.

(EMMA moves from massaging NOEL's calf to massaging above his knee. NOEL jumps as SHE nears his upper thigh)

NOEL

Sorry. Reflex action.

EMMA

Have you ever checked out a support meeting for trans men?

NOEL

A couple of times but most of them were in their teens and twenties. They thought my concerns about being a man with a vagina were old fashioned.

EMMA

I kind of agree. Seriously. Did you know Native Americans believe there are five kinds of sexual orientation? And that people born with both sex organs are a blessing to the community because they are in balance.

NOEL

I do not feel very well balanced.

EMMA

That's because you're clinging to this idea that something's wrong with you.

(Pause)

EMMA (CONT)

Noel, if he likes you just the way you are you should at least find out if you can be friends. Just a thought.

NOEL

He is my therapist.

EMMA

Oh. Well ... But still ... What if ... ?

(Silence. THAYER looks at himself in the mirror)

EMMA

So, just for the fun of it let's say your feelings are mutual. And he makes that crystal clear as you're walking out the door. And you say:

NOEL

I say:

NOEL

What if you're only attracted to me because I'm a freak?

NOEL

And I explain the whole exotic sex-not-that-that-is-me thing – which he has probably already figured out.

(Pause)

I do not want to hurt his feelings.

(Pause)

His struggle to get through to me is as genuine as he is.

(Pause)

But if I let him know how I feel he'll have to stop being my therapist, won't he?

THAYER

So, just for the fun of it let's say our feelings are mutual. And he makes that crystal clear as he's walking out the door. And you say:

THAYER

I say: What if you're only attracted to me because I'm a therapist?

THAYER

And I explain the whole father/son abuse of power thing – which he has probably already figured out.

(Pause)

I do not want to hurt his feelings.

(Pause)

His struggle to become whole is as genuine as he is.

THAYER

But if I let him know how I feel we won't be able to see each other for at least a year. Or is it two? I think it's two.

(EMMA finishes massaging NOEL)

EMMA

Alright, Noel – you're cooked!

(EMMA holds up the sheet so NOEL can get off the table. NOEL puts on his shoes behind the sheet as THAYER crosses DSC. NOEL comes out from behind the sheet and crosses to THAYER as EMMA exits)

LIGHT CUE: Light Shift

PLACE: THAYER's Office

(THAYER and NOEL face EACH OTHER)

THAYER

There won't be any charge for this session.

NOEL

Thank you.

(THEY shake hands and look at EACH OTHER for so long it feels as if THEY might hug. THAYER catches himself – lets go of NOEL's hand)

THAYER

Sweet sorrow and all that.

(NOEL opens the door. Turns back)

NOEL

Hope the Holidays are good to you.

(THAYER nods his appreciation self-consciously)

THAYER

Yes ... you, too.

(NOEL exits. THAYER takes a long, deep, sad breath and picks up Poppy's leash)

Come out, come out wherever you are. Poppy?

(looks under couch)

Why are you hiding under the couch?

(pause)

Maybe I should join you.

LIGHT CUE: Lights Out

SCENE EIGHT

TIME: December, 2010

PLACE: THAYER's apartment – living room

SOUND CUE: "Love is a Stranger" by the Eurythmics

LIGHT CUE: Lights Up

AT RISE: EMMA is alone in the living room doing her exercises with a wide elastic band. SHE puts one end of the band under her feet – the other in her hand and stretches to one side. Then the other. SHE is singing along with Annie Lennox and having a good time.

SOUND CUE: Front door slams

EMMA grabs the remote to turn off the music but as she points it toward the stereo her right hand starts to tremble. SHE manages to click off music.

SOUND CUE: "Love is a Stranger" by the Eurythmics – OUT

EMMA puts down the remote and looks at her shaking hand. Shakes it. Nothing. Slaps it. Nothing. THAYER enters looking bedraggled and depressed. EMMA puts her still shaking hand behind her back.

EMMA

Hey, there – how was your day?

THAYER

I've had better.
(Pause)
What are you hiding?

EMMA

Nothing.

(EMMA shows THAYER both hands – no shaking)

THAYER

Want to go out for dinner?

EMMA

Half an hour. I just need to finish my exercises.

THAYER

Mexican? I could use a margarita.

EMMA

You look as if you're about to burst into tears.

THAYER

It's nothing, really. One of my patients is moving on.

EMMA

Why?

THAYER

Can't really say.

EMMA

(like WC Fields)

Ah, yees – patient confidentiality and all thaaaat.

THAYER

(like WC Fields)

"There comes a time in the affairs of man when he must take the bull by the tail and face the situation."

(THAYER exits. EMMA looks at her hand – moves her fingers back and forth as if SHE's squeezing a rubber ball. SHE massages her right shoulder, does a few neck rolls and shakes herself off. SHE lies face down on her exercise mat – goes into a Plank Position)

EMMA

One one thousand, two one thousand, three one thousand, four one th –

(EMMA's left arm starts shaking. SHE tries to hold onto her plank – eventually collapses. SHE sits up. Looks at her hands and arms)

What's up, Body Beautiful? I'm taking plenty of supplements. Am I pushing you too hard? I am, aren't I?

(Opens a jar of supplements)

Some Wild Yam for good measure.

(Picks up water bottle – swallows two supplements)

And I'll call my acupuncturist in the morning. Promise.

(EMMA goes to the doorway – yells:)

Thayer, we can go now if you want! I'm taking the rest of the night off.

(EMMA puts on her hoodie – starts to zip it up but her hands are still trembling. THAYER enters – sees EMMA struggling with her zipper – helps HER)

THAYER

Maybe you should see a doctor.

(THAYER finishes zipping EMMA's zipper)

EMMA

I'm calling Dr. Bell in the morning.

THAYER

Not an acupuncturist – an actual graduate from medical school.

EMMA

It's probably a mineral deficiency. Right now because of the Holidays a lot of my clients need deep massages. I can't tell them No and I haven't been drinking enough water.

THAYER

I worry about you, Em.

EMMA

Worry is a waste of perfectly good energy, Thayer -

THAYER

Em, there's nothing wrong with seeking professional medical help! It doesn't mean you've failed.

EMMA

Ninety percent of the time the meds doctors give you stop the symptoms but not the problem. Case in point the issue I had with my Pancreas.

THAYER

Fine.

EMMA

Besides, I don't like putting toxins in my body and I'm not about to start.

THAYER

Your body can handle toxins. Case in point, the air you breathe.

EMMA

Thayer, three months ago I saw my homeopath for my annual blood test - my annual in-depth blood test - something MDs rarely do, by the way ... if ever - and everything was normal so whatever it is it's nothing serious.

THAYER

You are so stubborn.

EMMA

It's my body, Thayer and I take really good care of it which is more than I can say for you Mr. I'm-Going-To-Start-Pilates-When-My-Hip-Has-Healed.

THAYER

Can we just agree to disagree? I don't have the energy for this.

EMMA

I'm sorry.

THAYER

No worries. I'm just tired.

EMMA

Of what?

THAYER

Myself! My life!!

EMMA

Yikes! Okay.

THAYER

And I have no right to be.

EMMA

Oh ... that.

THAYER

Anyway, I've changed my mind about Mexican. Let's go to the fish place.

EMMA

I'm definitely in the mood for the fish place.

THAYER

And I'm definitely in the mood for one of their hefty gin martinis.

EMMA

Why don't we have some people over? It's been a while since we've had a dinner party.

THAYER

I don't know. It's just the same old talk about stuff no one remembers. It all seems so pointless.

EMMA

What if you invite someone I don't know and I invite someone you don't know? Shake things up a bit.

(THAYER takes his wallet out of his back pocket to make sure he's got his credit card)

My treat, Old Man.

(THAYER holds door open for EMMA)

THAYER

I accept, Old Girl.

LIGHT CUE: Lights Out

SCENE NINE-A

TIME: January, 2011

PLACE: Police Station (SL); NOEL's Meditation Cushion (SR)

LIGHT CUE: Light Specials SL and SR - Up

AT RISE: MARCO, still slightly drunk, is talking to a police officer (SR). NOEL is preparing to meditate (SL).

MARCO

That's right, Officer – first I get drunk then I go to the men's room 'cause I think I'm like gonna puke. I look under the, uh, stall to see if anyone's in it and these feet are pointing toward the door like someone's taking a dump. But it sounds more like a piss, you know?

(NOEL bows to begin his meditation)

How many guys do you know who sit down to take a leak? Alright, maybe if they got a screwed up, uh ... what's it called? ... Prostrate! But, uh, in a pool hall? So right away I think something's up.

(NOEL enters MARCO's world as if from the stall)

LIGHT CUE: Lights Up

MARCO (CONT)

But when it opens the door it's old enough to be my mother. It has hair on its face and a low kinda, uh, pervert voice that says:

NOEL/STRANGER

Excuse me.

MARCO

But instead of letting it pass I say: The ladies room is next door.

(NOEL and MARCO re-enact the following:)

It goes to the sink to wash its hands – pretending it doesn't hear me. I, uh, come up behind it. Follow it to the towel dispenser – my, uh, dick almost touching its back. It turns to leave but I'm in the way. It says:

NOEL/STRANGER

You would be wise to let me pass.

MARCO

And then it's like the, uh, danger takes over and I'm like on the ceiling watching me grab it by the, uh, necktie. "I would be wise?" I say. "You're the fucking trespasser!" It looks down like the, uh, floor is more interesting than the point I'm making and I think: Liar! It tries to take my hand off its tie so I, uh, bang it up against the wall and grab its crotch. It doesn't react – not the way a real man would, right? – so I say: I, uh, thought so. And as I raise my fist, it turns its head. I think

MARCO (CONT)

it's so I don't break its nose then I realize – it's looking at the, uh, fucking – what's the word? ... uh, surveillance camera which is when I start screaming, "You raised us to tell the truth and the whole time you were fucking lying! Fuck the truth!"

(to the security camera)

Fuck the fucking truth!!

(to Cop)

Then I punch it in the face.

(MARCO punches NOEL/STRANGER in the face)

In the gut.

(MARCO punches NOEL/STRANGER in the gut)

It looks up at me and says:

NOEL/STRANGER

Do I know you?

MARCO

I push it to the floor.

(NOEL falls on his meditation cushion – raises his forearms as if to shield his face)

Then, just in case it gets any bright ideas I kick it in the ribs and it just sits there like the, you know, fucking Buddha. So I wash my face.

(HE looks at his reflection in the mirror – scoffing:)

Do I know you?

(NOEL closes his eyes – returns to meditating. MARCO begins to unravel as HE continues looking at his reflection – now addressing HIMSELF)

DO I KNOW YOU?!

(HE fights for self-control)

Then I start puking. And that's when I come down from the ceiling and like call, uh, 911.

(MARCO holds out his hands ready to be handcuffed)

SOUND CUE: Handcuffs being locked

(NOEL sits bolt upright)

NOEL

Marco!

SOUND CUE: Handcuffs being locked - Out

LIGHT CUE: Lights Out

SCENE NINE

TIME: January, 2011

PLACE: Street on Upper Westside

LIGHT CUE: Lights Up

AT RISE: NOEL walking down the street but his focus is on the conversation he's having on his cell.

NOEL

(into cell)

Do I have to beg you?

(Listening)

I do not care if he does not want me to have it – I am his *mamá*. I have a right to talk to *mi hijo*!

(Listening)

Entonces, da me su address in jail. Let me at least send him my letter.

(Listening)

Pues, donde está?

(Listening)

Anger what? I lost you.

(Listening)

Por cuanto tiempo?

(Listening)

I don't understand *porqué* we can't communicate *con él*. Six weeks is a long time. This is his only offence. And he turned himself in.

(Listening)

Entonces, I will send the letter for Marco a *tu casa*, Enrique. Just make sure he gets it. We will figure this out. Marco is not a criminal.

(Listening)

Otra vez – you're breaking up.

(NOEL drifts SL totally focused on Enrique's response as THAYER backs on stage from SR)

THAYER

(To EMMA OS)

Okay – you finish walking her and I'll pick up the bread at Zabar's. Should I get some St. Alban's?

(Listening)

Unsalted. Got it.

(Listening)

What about the hardware store?

(Listening)

WD40? Oh, right – the door knob! See you in a bit!

(THAYER waves at EMMA (OS) and backs into NOEL as NOEL is hanging up. NOEL's cell falls out of his hand.

NOEL leans over to pick it up as THAYER turns around)

Oh, excuse me. I wasn't paying ... Noel?

NOEL

Oh, uh ... Doctor ... uh ...

THAYER

Thayer.

(THEY shake)

Well ... I, uh ... I'm buying bread and cheese ... and ... unsalted cashews.

NOEL

Oh.

(clearing his throat)

I am on my way to the Post Office.

THAYER

Good for us.

(Awkward Pause)

NOEL

My son got himself in trouble.

THAYER

I'm so sorry.

NOEL

I have written him another letter.

THAYER

Excellent.

(NOEL clears his throat again)

NOEL

He beat somebody up.

THAYER

Oh, no.

NOEL

He has always had a short fuse.

(Pause)

I am trying not to blame myself.

THAYER

Do you have someone you can talk to?

NOEL

Not a therapist but just as good.

THAYER

Good.

NOEL

Well ... see you.

THAYER

See you.

(THEY start to shake but very quickly it turns into a hug. NOEL begins to melt – struggles for self-control)

NOEL

My ex will not give me Marco's cell. I guess Marco has to want to give it to me himself.

(Pause)

I could use a friend.

THAYER

(breaking embrace)

I could, too.

NOEL

I want to be respectful but I –

THAYER

– miss you.

NOEL

Yes.

THAYER

Me, too.

NOEL

Two years is a long time.

THAYER

One year, ten months and twenty-three days – but who's counting?

NOEL

(teasing)

Not me.

THAYER

(clearing his throat)

Still, it's important we use this time to think deeply about the true nature of our attraction. Projection can be very seductive. So, for example, if you have a need for a father figure –

NOEL

Do I?

THAYER

Hypothetically. And ... and if I ... because there is an age difference ... not a bad one ... but ... I tend to be attracted to ... younger men because ... the father thing ... is probably more my thing than –

(NOEL smiles as THAYER babbles)

What?

NOEL

Nothing. Well, not nothing ... But ... I will use the remaining time to contemplate my deeper motivations.

(NOEL starts to leave – turns back)

And just so you know ... I understand your ... ambivalence.

(NOEL starts walking away – waves his letter in the air)

But I don't have to like it.

(THAYER hesitates then catches up with NOEL)

THAYER

"When I walk with you I feel as if I had a flower in my buttonhole."

NOEL

I'm paraphrasing but: Maybe the truth rests on a stroll around a lake.

THAYER

Or, maybe, in this case ... the post office.

(THEY laugh. THAYER jams his hands in his pockets as NOEL puts his arm around THAYER's shoulders. THEY start to exit. Suddenly THAYER pivots out from under NOEL's arm – looks at NOEL with guilty eyes)

THAYER

I'm sorry.

NOEL

You are right.

THAYER

I'll only want to kiss you.

NOEL

(extending his hand)

Not that.

(THAYER hesitates then takes NOEL's hand and shakes it)

THAYER

See you in one year, ten months and twenty-three days.

NOEL

(teasing)

If I last that long.

(NOEL lets go of THAYER's hand. THEY turn in opposite directions. THAYER turns back – watches NOEL disappear)

THAYER

If I last that long? What's that supposed to mean?

(runs a few steps in NOEL'S direction)

Get a grip! You're a grown man and he's a – okay, he's a grown man, too, so that's the good news – but he – he said he's seeing someone who is better than a therapist – what kind of person is better than a therapist? And then he called me ambivalent. I'm probably driving him crazy – the way I do Emma – and he's got all this time to ... to come to his senses?!

(adjusts his shoulder bag)

Let him go, Thayer. If it's meant to be and all that yammer, yammer. It's just as well. Emma wouldn't take this lightly – you know she wouldn't – not this time. Oh, I almost forgot – Zabar's!

(THAYER exits)

LIGHT CUE: Lights Out

SCENE TEN

TIME: August, 2011 – Evening

PLACE: THAYER's apartment – living room

AT RISE: THAYER and EMMA sit side by side on the couch. EMMA is writing on a pad of paper.

LIGHT CUE: Lights Up

EMMA

Thayer Thacher died on ... whenever ... of an incurable ... whatever. He attended Columbia University where he met his outspoken wife, Emma Lewis who refused to surrender her maiden name and, was therefore, far more ... interesting than he was.

THAYER

True that.

(EMMA starts laughing)

EMMA

When did you start saying true that?

(THAYER starts laughing)

THAYER

I don't know. Just now?

(The laughter builds as EMMA points toward the window)

EMMA

The sun ...

THAYER

(imitating EMMA)

The sun ...

EMMA

Shut up. Don't you want to be that warm orangey-gold and tumble over all the people you love?

THAYER

Mmmm hmmm.

EMMA

When Dad was nearing the end, he and I were sitting on his deck and you know how he had that incredible view of LA from downtown to the ocean? Well, on this night the sunset was so vast it covered the entire sky. We were totally immersed. Couldn't say a word.

(Pause)

And didn't - until the stars came out.

THAYER

"So the darkness shall be the light and the stillness the dancing."

(EMMA stares at THAYER who says sheepishly:)

T.S. Eliot?

EMMA

You're hopeless.

THAYER

Should we be picking up Poppy at the groomer's?

EMMA

Katie's going to. I didn't know how long we'd be. Then she'll walk her with the other dogs.

THAYER

You think of everything!

EMMA

That's why they pay me the big bucks.

(Silence. EMMA drifts into a dark place momentarily.

THAYER puts his arm around HER)

That was the shittiest, crappiest news I've ever heard.

THAYER

You need a second opinion.

EMMA

Yes, I do. And I'm high on it! Woo hoo!

THAYER

Whatever happens, Em, I've got your back.

EMMA

But how will you be able to retire with me shaking like a leaf? At some point I'll have to give up my practice. Maybe sooner than I think. And what about all the trips we want to take? Viet Nam, Cambodia - Bali ... It's so not fair.

THAYER

Neither is Parkinson's.

EMMA

Yeah, but you didn't sign up for this.

THAYER

Oh, so our old age was going to go so smoothly we were going to be healthy until we dropped dead simultaneously?

EMMA

Yes.

THAYER

If the tables were turned would you desert me?

EMMA

No.

THAYER

Well ...

(EMMA starts to laugh)

EMMA

(imitating THAYER)

Well ...

THAYER

(imitating EMMA)

Well ...

EMMA

(blushing)

I don't know what I'd do without you and I never have. When I was with the Drought Specialist you'd come to town and she'd get jealous. Said it felt like we were going out on a date.

THAYER

"To find a prince you've got to kiss some frogs."

(EMMA hits THAYER playfully)

EMMA

So now you're a prince? Spare me!

(THAYER starts laughing. EMMA starts tickling HIM. HE tickles her back. THEY laugh at nothing and everything. EMMA's laughter is about to turn to tears when:)

SOUND CUE: Doorbell

THAYER

Are you expecting anyone?

EMMA

Jerry Lee Lewis. I'm going to teach him how to shake, rattle and roll.

(THEY continue laughing while trying to determine who is at the door)

THAYER

Are you?

EMMA

What?

THAYER

Expecting ...

EMMA
 (looking at her belly)
 No. Are you?

THAYER
 (looking at his belly)
 I hope not.

EMMA
 Sh ... sh ...

THAYER
 Sh ... sh ...

EMMA
 Sh! Should we answer it anyway?

THAYER
 (calming down)
 You answer it. I'm going to get something to drink. Want anything?

EMMA
 Water. And a bag of popcorn.

THAYER
 Done and done-er.

(THAYER exits into the kitchen. EMMA staggers across the room and swings the front door open with flare. NOEL stands in the hallway holding a bunch of flowers. HE sees the surprise on EMMA's face)

NOEL
 Did I get the wrong night?

EMMA
 Karma-cly speaking – no ... but actually speaking – yes.

NOEL
 I am so sorry. I must have entered it wrong in my –

EMMA
 (holding door open)
 No worries – you're here – we're here ... it's all good!

(NOEL enters)

NOEL
 What a view!

EMMA
 I know ... and the light ... it's mesmerizing, isn't it?

NOEL
 Better than a fireplace.

(EMMA is looking out the window as THAYER enters. NOEL turns around. HE and THAYER stare at EACH OTHER in disbelief. THAYER looks at the flowers in NOEL's hand as EMMA turns around)

EMMA

Oh, Thayer – this is my friend, Noel. I invited him for our dinner with new friends ...

(NOEL, stunned, hands THAYER the flowers)

... but he ... thought it was this week instead of next.

(THAYER, stunned, hands the flowers to EMMA. THAYER reaches out to shake NOEL's hand)

THAYER

Welcome.

NOEL

Nice to meet you.

(Awkward Silence)

EMMA

So ... we're ... we're having Ecstasy for dinner.

THAYER

And popcorn.

EMMA

Want some?

NOEL

Popcorn always. I've ... uh, never tried Ecstasy ...

EMMA

It makes you feel like ... kissing the world!

(EMMA gets the small box that houses the Ecstasy)

There's one tablet left.

(EMMA hands small box to NOEL)

Thayer's old boyfriend left it behind when they broke up.

(teasing)

Ar-man-do. You have to roll the R – Arrrrrrmando.

(NOEL takes small box uncertainly)

You won't regret it!

THAYER

What would you like to drink?

EMMA

I'll get it. I have to put the flowers in water, anyway. You two get to know each other.

(NOEL smiles at THAYER uncertainly)

There are no accidents, Noel! Isn't life ... isn't it just so ... like ... worth it!?

(starts to head for the kitchen)

EMMA (CONT)

What am I getting?

NOEL

I'm not much of a drinker.

EMMA

Then how about some herbal iced tea made in the sun that streams through our living room window? Oh, I love you, window!

(singing as SHE exits)

"You light up my life – you give me hope where there is none."

(THAYER and NOEL look at EACH OTHER – not quite knowing how to proceed)

NOEL

I should probably go.

THAYER

No.

NOEL

But we agreed we wouldn't -

THAYER

I know ... it's just ... you're here so ... not today. I couldn't bare it.

(NOEL looks at the floor)

NOEL

All this back and forth ...

THAYER

Does it drive you crazy?

NOEL

Kind of.

(Awkward Pause)

NOEL and THAYER

So how do you know Emma?

NOEL

She's my massage therapist. You?

THAYER

She's my roommate. And, uh ... ex-wife.

NOEL

I didn't know you were married.

THAYER

Long time ago.

NOEL

Oh. So maybe we should tell her we know each other.

THAYER

She's had some bad news today – might not be the right time.

(NOEL puts down the Ecstasy and starts to head for the door)

NOEL

No disrespect but I have spent so much of my life pretending. People just get hurt. Emma is the last person I would want to –

SOUND CUE: Glass vase shattering on wood floor

EMMA (OS)

Shit!

THAYER

(yelling)

You okay?

(EMMA comes to doorway)

EMMA

I broke the green vase. The hand painted one that belonged to your mother.

(THAYER takes a deep breath – clearly disappointed)

THAYER

Let me clean it up. I don't want you cutting yourself.

(THAYER exits. EMMA hands NOEL a glass of iced tea. Her hand is shaking. NOEL looks at HER quizzically)

EMMA

Oh, this ... yeah.

(Pause)

Parkinson's. Just found out. That's why we broke out the Ecstasy. Special occasion and all that.

NOEL

I am so sorry.

EMMA

So did you and Thayer have a nice chat?

NOEL

Absolutely.

(Pause)

Look – I am thinking maybe this is not the right night to –

EMMA

It's exactly the right night. Seriously. Thayer likes you – I can tell.

NOEL

It's just ... I have had a day, too. Not hard like yours but – emotional.

EMMA

Is everything okay?

NOEL

The good news is, when things get chaotic inside I have gotten a lot better at relaxing into the craziness instead of thinking something is wrong with me and pushing it away.

EMMA

Is it Marco?

NOEL

Oh, no – he is fine.

EMMA

He's done with Anger Management, right?

NOEL

Months ago.

EMMA

That's right. And he's in therapy.

NOEL

And back with his girlfriend.

EMMA

You're kidding! How did you find out?

NOEL

I am almost afraid to tell you! Bad luck an all that.
(Takes a deep breath)
Marco sent me an e-mail.

EMMA

You heard from him?!

(THAYER re-enters with a vase full of flowers)

THAYER

Who heard from whom?

EMMA

Noel heard from his son! It's a long story.

THAYER

Maybe you'd like to tell me.

NOEL

Uh, some other time.

EMMA

I've got to pee in the worst way.

(EMMA exits. THAYER puts the flowers on the dining table)

THAYER

You heard from Marco?

NOEL

He sent me an e-mail shortly after he received my last letter. He is back with Angie and they are pregnant.

THAYER

Congratulations. You must be very ...

NOEL

I am very.

THAYER

I would be, too.

NOEL

He wants me to come to the wedding.

THAYER

That's wonderful news, Noel.

NOEL

I am nervous but I am going. Not sure how long I will stay. No reason for me to be in New York now, really. Especially since I have decided against the bottom surgery.

(Takes Ecstasy out of the box and swallows it with his iced tea)

Might as well join the fun!

SOUND CUE: Toilet flushes

THAYER

Well, that's quite a step ... foregoing your bottom surgery.

NOEL

I have Emma to thank for it. And Native Americans revering people born male and female because they are in balance.

THAYER

Makes total sense.

NOEL

I do not want her to feel betrayed by us pretending to be new to each other.

THAYER

I'm just feeling a little protective right now. We're both in shock. It's probably best if I tell her, anyway — you know ... when we're in our right minds again.

LIGHT CUE: Lights Up on Meditation Room SR

(NOEL walks to the window as EMMA enters the Meditation room – sits on the cushion. THAYER leans on the back of the couch – his back to NOEL)

EMMA

I'm not feeling like a very good Buddhist today. Sorry. And I don't mean to complain ... but I don't understand why this is happening.

(Pause)

I've always taken care of my body. It's my best friend, you know? Alright, maybe when Thayer decided he was gay I wished I'd had a penis. And maybe I don't like it when people call me Sir or tell me I remind them of their fathers - but I watch my gluten, and dairy intake – even sugar - and my body stays strong and responsive. Every morning we wake up glad to be alive – or we used to - didn't we, Body Beautiful?

(Pause – to her body)

So when the neurons in my brain started breaking down - why didn't you tell me - when you tell me everything – or I thought you did. Was it something I ate? Or didn't eat? I mean, it's not like I've abused you with drugs. You don't get to count today. When was the last time I got high? When? I bet you don't even remember. Neither do I. That's how long ago it was.

SOUND CUE: Text arriving on NOEL's cell

NOEL

(looking at text)

Marco wants me to send him my picture so he knows who to meet at the airport.

(THAYER sits on the couch – pats it so NOEL will sit next to HIM. But NOEL returns to looking out the window as EMMA, still in the meditation room, begins to unravel)

EMMA

I'm sorry ... It's just ... because what happens when Thayer realizes how stuck he is? How completely stuck because of some romantic promise he made this afternoon when we were leaving the doctor's office.

(Pause)

At least I like Dr. Rogers. Even though she thinks I wasted too much time trying to heal myself with supplements. We'll turn this around, Body Beautiful. Or slow it down. I'll drink more water – I know I'm bad about that and you've been very patient. We're still in this together, aren't we? I'm just ... okay ... I'm scared and I know fear is toxic so I'll work through it as fast as I can. Every day ... what Noel said ... I'll breathe into what's so.

(Silence. THAYER comes up behind NOEL – slips his arms around HIM. NOEL leans into THAYER)

Thank God for Thayer. I won't fight him anymore. If he wants me to get 20 second opinions I'll do it. And I won't get all uppity

EMMA (CONT)

when he reminds me to use a cane or lift weights or whatever. We're a team. We stay strong for each other. That's what we've always done.

(Silence. EMMA stands – a little shaky)

So some things haven't changed. I guess that's the good news.

(Silence. THAYER, still behind NOEL, removes NOEL's cell from his hand – takes a selfie of the two of THEM then turns NOEL toward HIM – takes a photo of NOEL by himself)

THAYER

Send me a copy, will you?

(THAYER hands NOEL his cell. THEY look in EACH OTHER's eyes)

EMMA

Well, thanks for this little chat.

(EMMA puts her hands on her hipbones – then thoughtfully:)

Basic Goodness. Respect. Openness.

(SHE bows and as SHE exits the meditation room, THAYER and NOEL engage in a passionate kiss)

LIGHT CUE: Lights on Meditation Room SR – Out

(EMMA walks into living room. THAYER and NOEL don't notice HER. SHE turns to leave. THAYER comes up for air. Their eyes meet)

THAYER

Emma.

(EMMA looks at NOEL – all the pieces fall together)

EMMA

So when you said you were in love with your therapist ...

(turning to THAYER)

And when you said your client had moved on and we went to the fish place so you could drink martinis on an empty stomach ...

THAYER

It's nothing, Em.

EMMA

Don't.

NOEL

I, uh ... I am going to California to see Marco. I am not sure when I will be back. Maybe never. I was going to tell you when I saw you next week.

EMMA

When were you going to tell Thayer?

NOEL

We had agreed we would not communicate so I ... I ... I do not know how I was going to tell Thayer. Marco might take one look at me and regret his invitation so ... there is really nothing to say until ... I have a clearer ...

THAYER

We're not an item.

EMMA

But you'd like to be.

NOEL

It is hard to say.

THAYER

It is?

EMMA

Thayer is a good man.

(starting to tear up)

You should jump at the opportunity.

(THAYER goes to put his arm around EMMA. SHE shrugs

HIM off)

Don't patronize me.

THAYER

How am I being patronizing?

EMMA

You're the therapist. Figure it out.

NOEL

Emma -

THAYER

It's the Ecstasy.

EMMA

It's love.

NOEL

It is love - you are right. But that does not mean it is going to turn into a thing.

THAYER

Why do you keep saying things like that? I thought we were waiting so I didn't lose my license. Is there something you're not telling me?

NOEL

Marco and Angie work. What if they want me to stay on to take care of their baby?

THAYER
 What if they don't?

NOEL
 That is my point.

THAYER
 What is?

NOEL
 I can't give you an answer.

EMMA
 You two work it out. I'm going to take a bath.

THAYER
 There's nothing to work out.

EMMA
 Thayer, I'm a big girl. You can stop pretending. It's obvious you love each other. Go for it! God!

(EMMA starts to leave)

NOEL
 I better go.

THAYER
 Will I see you again?

(EMMA turns around – looks at NOEL)

NOEL
 How do you want me to answer that when we are not even supposed to be seeing each other now?

THAYER
 You're right. Sorry ... I ... I never asked.

(THAYER opens the door. NOEL looks back at EMMA)

NOEL
 Should I come next week?

(EMMA walks to the window – looks out)

EMMA
 Of course.

(NOEL exits. THAYER closes the door – stands awkwardly looking at EMMA's back)

THAYER
 Sometimes "The light you see at the end of a tunnel is the front of an on-coming train."

EMMA

Just ... for once will you use your own words? I don't care how well read you are. Or that you have a photographic memory.

(turning around and grabbing her heart)

I care about what's in here! What is in here, Thayer? Anything?

(Silence. THAYER sits on the couch. EMMA is still looking out the window)

THAYER

Love is in here, Em. The kind of love I've been waiting for – at least, as far as I can tell. It's that simple ... and that complicated ... and scary.

EMMA

(angrily)

Well, I'm happy for you.

THAYER

Maybe ... but you're also hurting.

EMMA

Don't you dare tell me how I feel. Just because you've been to therapy school doesn't make you some big – because you've always done that and I've always hated it! So you might as well know. I've just plain hated it!!

(THAYER approaches EMMA)

And he will, too!!!

THAYER

Em ...

EMMA

He has a vagina, Thayer! A vagina!

THAYER

So?

EMMA

Well, so do I – in case you hadn't noticed. But maybe mine isn't good enough for you.

THAYER

Em, look at me.

EMMA

No!

THAYER

Look at me! Come on!

(HE takes EMMA by the shoulders. SHE looks out window)

Look at me.

(EMMA looks at THAYER resenting every second of it)

What do you see?

EMMA

An asshole.

(EMMA looks out window. THAYER stands in front of window in EMMA's line of vision)

THAYER

What else?

EMMA

What do you want me to say?

THAYER

What you see.

EMMA

You. Jeez.

THAYER

You who?

EMMA

Thayer! What is this? Some kind of therapy trick?

(EMMA starts to unravel. THAYER takes EMMA in his arms)

I never should've moved in with you. It feels like the end of our marriage all over again. But I thought when you said you were old and undesirable – I thought ...

(filling with shame)

... okay, maybe now it would be okay to ... love you, you know?

(wiping her eyes and pushing THAYER away)

I'm so unbelievably clueless.

THAYER

I haven't left you, Emma – and I never will.

EMMA

(playing with a flower)

Don't do me any favors. When I can't take care of myself I'll ... I'll – I'll apply for public assistance and go into a home where I will devote every shaking ounce of strength to leaving my body again only this time I won't come back!

(THAYER approaches EMMA carefully)

You're not the only game in town, you know!

(EMMA pulls some flowers out of the vase – her hands shaking. SHE hits THAYER with the flowers. HE grabs her hands)

THAYER

Do you know how badly I've wanted to be in love with you?

(EMMA lets go of the flowers)

How badly I've wished I could give you what you need?

(EMMA kisses THAYER. THAYER hesitates then kisses her back. Their kisses grow passionate. THEY continue kissing throughout:)

I'll take Testosterone.

EMMA

Only if you want to.

THAYER

Grow a beard.

EMMA

I don't like beards.

THAYER

Then a moustache.

EMMA

A handlebar.

THAYER

Yes, oh, yes! And when people call me Sir I'll ask them to say it louder. And faster! And harder! Mmmmm ...

EMMA

Mmmm hmmm ...

THAYER

(THAYER stops kissing EMMA. THEY are both alarmed by their passion. THAYER sits on one end of the couch. EMMA sits on the other. THEY can't look at EACH OTHER. Pause)

What just happened ...

THAYER

Just ... don't blame it on the Ecstasy.

EMMA

(THAYER smiles uncertainly. THEY look out the window – EMMA's right leg shaking ever so slightly)

SOUND CUE: Dog barking

(EMMA starts to get up slowly)

SOUND CUE: Dog scratching at door

SOUND CUE: Doorbell rings

THAYER
(motioning EMMA to stay seated)
I've got this.
(opens door)
Oh, Poppy – look at you!

(As THAYER fusses over Poppy, EMMA puts her hand on her leg to try to stop the shaking)

LIGHT CUE: Lights out

SCENE ELEVEN-A

TIME: September, 2011

PLACE: The front seat of MARCO's truck that is parked in the airport parking lot.

LIGHT CUE: Lights Up

AT RISE: NOEL opens the door on the passenger side of MARCO's truck, gets in and fastens his seat belt as MARCO puts NOEL's suitcase in the back – blows out three sharp breaths to steady his nerves –

SOUND CUE: Back door of truck slamming hard

- and slams the back door a little too hard. MARCO climbs into the driver's seat and fastens his seat belt – never looking at NOEL. NOEL opens his wallet.

NOEL

Here's some money for parking.

MARCO

I got it.

NOEL

Then gas.

MARCO

(slightly annoyed)

I got it.

(Pause)

Sorry.

NOEL

No problema.

(Pause)

It is good to see you.

MARCO

It's ... uh ... yeah.

(Pause)

I didn't mean to slam the door.

(Pause)

Good to see you, yeah ...

(Pause)

And, uh ... weird.

NOEL

For me, too.

(MARCO turns key in ignition. THEY ride in Silence)

SOUND CUE: Car engine starting

SOUND CUE: Car engine running

NOEL

Doesn't look as if the Valley has been hit that hard by the drought.

MARCO

We had some rain in 2010 but the three years before that were scary.

(Silence)

NOEL

So you and Angie – you have been together for a while, no?

MARCO

Five years – until she, you know, uh ... couldn't stand me anymore.

NOEL

You must have done something right.

MARCO

We weren't planning to, uh, get pregnant. I got a weekend pass from the, you know, Anger thing. We made up. Shit like that. Girls are funny, right? You can tell them you murdered your mother but if you tell them from your heart they, uh, love you even more. Crazy.

NOEL

It is all about connection.

MARCO

Was it that way for you ... when you were, uh, a ... you know?

NOEL

Sí como no, mijo – still is.

(Silence)

MARCO

Polo couldn't stop hating you – he tried ...

NOEL

And you?

MARCO

I should've, you know ... read your letter before I, uh, tore it up.

NOEL

You have no idea how often I have replayed the moment I told you boys. Maybe I was too eager for your understanding. I should not have left for New York so quickly – that I will always be sad

NOEL (CONT)

about - but I was not prepared for the hatred in your eyes.

MARCO

You lied to us our whole lives.

NOEL

I was afraid of losing you, Marco - as afraid as I was of losing myself.

MARCO

Plus it was like ... like you were going against how God - like a sin you wanted us to, uh, be okay with.

(Silence)

NOEL

Do you still think I killed Polo?

MARCO

You had a connection.

NOEL

Yes we did.

MARCO

It was like you could read each other's minds and then it was gone. Like: "Get over it, Polo! I never was who you thought I was." Why didn't you write?

NOEL

I did.

MARCO

With your address.

NOEL

And with how badly I wanted to hear from you when you were ready. How many times could I apologize?

(Pause)

MARCO

I miss Polo.

NOEL

Yo también, mijo.

(Pause)

I miss the way we could build on each other's thoughts - travel out there not really knowing where "there" was - just that it felt free. And you would look at us like we were crazy. I worried you felt left out - but if you did you never took it out on Polo.

MARCO

He had my back.

NOEL

Polo freed my mind, Marco, no question – but you freed my heart. Except when you were growing up I was often afraid of my heart, see. It could take me in directions I did not always understand.

MARCO

And now?

NOEL

Now ... I am much more ... because love is the great ... How much do you want to know?

MARCO

If you feel stuck with me.

NOEL

Oh, *mijo*, I have never, ever felt stuck with you. You are deep thinking like your father. You need to take your time – you think with your whole body.

MARCO

I am supposed to breathe when I lose my words but sometimes the, you know, the anger still – it comes so fast ... like fireworks.

NOEL

When you were four you used to run through the field out back. You would spread your arms and laugh and turn in circles. And I would watch you when I was doing dishes – you were so full of life it was as if you had to give it away to make room for more.

(Pause)

That was what I put in my letter. My admiration for your natural beauty because it was always there only I am not sure I ever told you.

MARCO

You told me.

NOEL

In words, maybe, but what if I had run through the field with you? And what if I had asked Polo to join us so we could experience your world instead of always expecting you to come into ours? You aren't Polo, Marco and you never will be. And that is a good thing.

(Pause)

And it is very brave of you to want to keep him alive.

MARCO

(unexpectedly moved)

Ay, mamá ...

(NOEL takes MARCO's hand)

NOEL

Escuchame, querido – you have more love inside you than any of us – more than you can handle. It has always been that way for you. Angie is a very lucky woman. You can tell her I said so.

(Pause)

MARCO

So you know, I'm ... uh, done with Jesus. Angie still takes The Bible literal. Don't know what that'll mean for our, you know, kid.

NOEL

I am done with Jesus, too.

MARCO

Yeah?

NOEL

Yeah.

MARCO

Too much God is a loving god. God is an angry god. And it's like, uh, make up your minds, right?

NOEL

I do not mind The Bible. I mind the way it is used as a weapon.

MARCO

That's what I've been trying to explain to Angie, you know? But you just said the words. A weapon – yeah. Uh, thanks.

NOEL

En cualquier tiempo.

(Pause)

MARCO

If you had it to do over again, would you?

NOEL

That is a good question. I am not sure.

(Pause)

Or maybe probably ... because ... sometimes I think it is as if we are put on earth to become. And we just keep becoming, see ... and becoming and becoming ...

MARCO

Even after we die?

NOEL

Why not?

MARCO

In the Anger Program I learned about this thing called Ahimsa which says all of us have like a spark of the, you know, divine inside so like when you hurt others you are hurting yourself. I like that idea better than I'm, uh, some kind of, you know – sinner.

NOEL

You are such a good man, Marco.

(MARCO looks at NOEL almost embarrassed)

MARCO

Uh ... so are you.

NOEL

I am working on it.

(THEY look at the passing farmlands)

LIGHT CUE: Lights OUT

SOUND CUE: Car engine running OUT

SCENE ELEVEN

TIME: April, 2013

PLACE: THAYER's apartment – living room; Meditation room DSR and NOEL's New York apartment – DSL

LIGHT CUE: Lights Up and Specials Up DSR and DSL

AT RISE: EMMA is sitting in her nightgown and bathrobe on a chair in the meditation room DSR. SHE is holding the cane THAYER used when HE was recovering from his hip surgery. THAYER is in the living room on his cell talking to NOEL who is sitting on a packing box DSL. HE is in the process of packing up his New York apartment. THAYER looks at a large, overstuffed suitcase by the front door of his apartment.

THAYER

I'll have to check my bag, too. How are the movers coming?

NOEL

Almost finished – then I'll swing by in an Uber.

(Pause)

What about Emma?

THAYER

I don't know anymore.

NOEL

Maybe we should back off.

THAYER

She'll be fine. She just needs to make more of an effort to go the gym.

(EMMA, still in the meditation room, presses on her right leg in an effort to calm a spasm. Her hand is bandaged from a fall)

EMMA

I don't know how to say this but I'm having a really shitty day – the shittiest ever. Not sure how much longer I can keep sitting here dutifully trying to open to what's so with my body when all I really want to do is shoot it ... just to stop the shaking – not to shoot myself – just to be clear. Only to give my body a break. Even though we don't belong to each other anymore. Anymore than Thayer and I don't belong to each other anymore. This has been his worst trip home since he started commuting to Salinas. I wish he'd just move out there and get it over with. And if he tells me one more time to go to the gym ...

NOEL

How is she healing?

THAYER

Her hand is still a bit banged up but her leg is better. She was lucky she didn't break her hip.

NOEL

I wish she would come with us.

EMMA

(in meditation room)

And if either one of them hints around one more time about Salinas ... This is my home – and what about my doctors? If they were in my shoes they wouldn't want to give them up either.

THAYER

So ... you're about to no longer have a New York apartment.

(Pause)

Nervous?

NOEL

I never really felt I belonged here. It was safer than going through the transition in Salinas – not that that was an option. But now with Marco making every effort – I know it might not always seem that way –

THAYER

I worry I came into the picture too early.

NOEL

He knew how long we had waited.

THAYER

I know but he's had a lot to adjust to.

NOEL

He will accept you in time – just as he is accepting me.

EMMA

(in meditation room)

Plus Thayer has become so impatient. With me. With Poppy. Sometimes I think he thinks she tripped me on purpose. Or I got tangled in her leash on purpose so he'd come home early. I don't even know anymore. Plus I'm starting to feel a kind of stiffness.

(putting her hand over her heart center)

Here. It's getting hard to follow my breath. And the pause between breaths? Gone. Or, if it isn't gone I can't feel it so give me one good reason why I shouldn't bail on this ... this hope for some kind of spiritual insight that will turn this whole whatever it is ... into one great, big, everlasting Aha moment.

(Pause)

Total silence. Just what I thought.

(Pause)

Here I am losing touch with the part of me that goes on after I die and the best You can do is nothing.

(rising slowly)

EMMA (CONT)

Or maybe I've had it all wrong all along – is that it? Maybe death really is total darkness and I've been feeding myself a line of bull about reincarnation in order to ... well, not kill myself.

(Begins to exit)

Not sure when I'll be back. Do with that what you will.

(EMMA leaves the Meditation Room)

LIGHT CUE: Special SR - OUT

THAYER

I need to slow down.

NOEL

You need to retire.

THAYER

I wish.

NOEL

Then you could stay for a month at a time. Maybe two. Read. Cook.

THAYER

Nap.

NOEL

We nap well in Salinas, don't we?

THAYER

Until the baby wakes up.

NOEL

It gets easier.

THAYER

I've become so impatient – with Emma, with you ... I don't know how you put up with me.

NOEL

Well, maybe – just maybe ... you are worth it.

(Pause)

You still there?

THAYER

In my fashion.

NOEL

There are a lot more naps in our future, Honey.

(THAYER sighs as EMMA appears in the doorway. THAYER doesn't see HER)

THAYER

I love your granddaughter, Noel. And Marco and Angie – even your ex. I hope you know how lucky I feel to be sharing them with you. You are the family I used to wish for when I was a kid.

(EMMA enters the living room. THAYER hears the tapping of her cane and turns around)

Emma! Want to say hi to Noel?

(EMMA shakes her head No. THAYER to NOEL:)

I better go. See you in a bit.

NOEL

Love to Emma.

THAYER

Uh huh.

LIGHT CUE: Special SL - OUT

(NOEL exits as THAYER hangs up. EMMA looks at the suitcase by the front door)

EMMA

Big suitcase.

THAYER

Just going to leave a few things in Salinas so I don't have to do so much schlepping.

(Silence. EMMA pushes the mail on table to one side. Opens the New York Times - glances at it while:)

EMMA

I thought I was your family.

THAYER

You are.

EMMA

You never seemed interested in having children when we were married. Why the fascination now?

(THAYER stares at EMMA who keeps reading the paper)

Sorry. None of my business.

THAYER

What else can I do for you before I leave?

EMMA

You're right.

THAYER

About what?

EMMA

I don't know. Whatever you want to be right about.

THAYER

We agreed –

EMMA

(putting aside newspaper)

We didn't agree. The time came when you and Noel could legally see each other – you cut your practice in half –

THAYER

I didn't cut anything in half – I couldn't afford to. I started using Skype.

EMMA

Fine – you started using Skype and your clients went along with the whole commuting to Salinas thing because you were happier than you'd ever been. They could see that. I could see that. I still see it. And I also see it's killing you and you're taking it out on me when, really, you are terrified of making the decision you know you have to make because no one else can make it for you and we're all paying a price because you don't want to hurt my feelings. Hurt them, will you? And let's get on with our lives.

(Pause)

THAYER

How will you manage?

EMMA

I'll get my own place – it's what you want.

THAYER

I never said that.

EMMA

Oh, so all that talk about putting our – your apartment on the market was just so you could get a rise out of me?

(Pause)

Sorry. Sarcasm.

THAYER

I can't afford to hire nursing care for you and retire – you know that. I was simply exploring my options. Nothing is cast in stone.

EMMA

Because nothing ever is.

THAYER

(collecting himself)

You have every right to be angry with me.

EMMA

But I don't want to be! I don't want to be angry with anybody! Including Noel! And I'm not angry with Noel – not really – except I am. But what's he done? Loved you? Given you what you've always wanted? I should be happy for you. Why can't I be happy for you?

THAYER

Because you're not super human.

EMMA

Well, I should be. After all the meditating I've done I should have more – what? ... compassion, you know? For you, for Noel – for my body – but every day it reminds me it's not mine anymore and that pisses me off so I end up not meditating, not doing my exercises and, scariest of all – not being grateful – but that still doesn't stop me from sitting on the couch –

(SHE mocks HERSELF shaking. Pause)

I'll spend more time at the gym, I promise. Even if it takes me all day to get out of bed.

THAYER

What if you swam instead? There's a heated pool –

EMMA

I get stuck, Thayer. Some days I literally get stuck. It could happen on the street – in the elevator – in the deep end of the pool.

THAYER

I wasn't aware.

EMMA

Well, now you are.

(Silence. EMMA rifles through the mail. THAYER takes a piece of paper out of his pocket – smoothes it, hesitates, then shows it to EMMA)

THAYER

I ... uh ... I've updated the list. Expanded your team. Once I retire I'd like to stay in Salinas for a month at a time so you'll need more volunteers.

EMMA

What about the apartment?

THAYER

We're not there yet.

EMMA

But you just said when you retire you're going to have to sell it once I need professional care and it sounds like you've decided to retire.

THAYER

I'm thinking when I come back I'll stop taking new patients – see if that feels right and take it from there.

EMMA

So I should start looking for something in ... where, Queens?

THAYER

Let's not get ahead of ourselves. I'm still figuring out what I can afford between your coverage and –

EMMA

I should've taken out long-term health insurance but, no – God would provide or some such bullshit.

(Pause)

THAYER

God in the form of Thayer.

(EMMA, still looking through the mail runs across the Utility bill)

EMMA

Is it my month to pay Con Ed or yours?

THAYER

I don't know – yours. Can you just put down the mail? I need your undivided attention before Noel gets here.

(EMMA puts down the mail reluctantly as THAYER smoothes out his list)

So the dog walker will walk Poppy from now on. And I've added two more food services that deliver prepared meals. Cecile will look in on you this time and MK will back her up except on weekends. Anika from down the hall will back them up. They've all got keys. Cecile will take you to your doctors' appointments. What?

EMMA

Nothing.

THAYER

Tell me.

EMMA

It's not worth it.

THAYER

Fine.

EMMA

Sorry.

THAYER

You know I'd come back at the drop of a hat – just like I did this time.

EMMA

I don't want you coming back if you don't want to be here.

THAYER

Em ...

EMMA

Why don't you just admit it?

THAYER

What?

EMMA

Everything!

THAYER

What good would that do?

EMMA

It would clear the air for starters.

THAYER

Fine. I wish you weren't sick. I wish you'd come to Salinas with us. I wish you'd stop feeling sorry for yourself. I wish I could justify leaving you for good. I wish I could because I would. In a heartbeat. There, are you happy now? Have I said everything you've decided I believe?

(Pause)

Cecile and MK offered to help because they are friends. I didn't have to twist their arms or appeal to their Buddhist beliefs. And I don't care if you don't believe me.

(EMMA returns to the mail)

EMMA

I don't want them wiping my bottom.

THAYER

Well, I don't want them wiping your bottom either. Why would they?

EMMA

I poop in my pants.

THAYER

Since when?

EMMA

I don't know how much longer I can go without professional help – at least on my bad days. Maybe instead of selling the apartment we could rent a room to a nurse in exchange for –

(EMMA uncovers a letter from The Neptune Society)

Oh, how timely. The Neptune Society wants to oversee my cremation. Or, no – your cremation.

(Starts to open letter)

THAYER

Let me see that.

EMMA

I can still open a letter.

(reading)

Dear Mr. Thacher, Thank you for your inquiry regarding your ex-wife, Emma Lewis.

(EMMA stares at THAYER)

We haven't even written my obituary.

THAYER

I just wanted to have an idea of what to expect.

SOUND CUE: Door Buzzer rings

SOUND CUE: Door Buzzer - OUT

THAYER (CONT)

That would be Noel.

(THAYER hesitates)

EMMA

Well, what are you waiting for - permission?

THAYER

Oh, God, Emma! Will you stop?!

EMMA

I'll be gone by the time you come home.

THAYER

I'm not going to drop the ball!

EMMA

But you'd like to.

THAYER

Of course! Wouldn't you?

SOUND CUE: Door Buzzer rings w more urgency

SOUND CUE: Door Buzzer - OUT

EMMA

Just go!

THAYER

See you in two weeks.

EMMA

Don't do me any favors.

THAYER

Fine. See you when you're dead!

(THAYER slams the door as HE exits forgetting his suitcase. EMMA throws her cane after THAYER)

SOUND CUE: Poppy whines

(EMMA starts to shuffle toward Poppy)

EMMA

Did you get shut out, Sweet Girl?

(EMMA's right leg goes out from underneath HER. SHE grabs THAYER's suitcase to break her fall. It tips over and SHE with it)

SOUND CUE: Poppy's whining escalates

(EMMA crawls to the door - tries to turn the bedroom door handle. It is stuck as it has been for years. As SHE fumbles:)

SOUND CUE: Poppy barks a sharp bark

SOUND CUE: Poppy scratches the door

EMMA (CONT)

Settle, Poppy. Settle.

(EMMA fails again at turning the doorknob. SHE is losing her patience with Poppy)

Settle!!

SOUND CUE: Poppy barks louder

SOUND CUE: Poppy continues scratching the door

EMMA (CONT)

(banging on door)

Settle, settle, settle!!!

(EMMA bursts into tears - leans against the door. THAYER returns - a bit out of breath. EMMA doesn't hear HIM as HE grabs the handle of his suitcase)

I'm sorry, Poppy ... I'm sorry ... I got tired of nagging Thayer about the WD40.

(Banging her hands on door as Poppy continues barking and scratching)

I just hate, hate, hate who I've become!

SOUND CUE: Poppy barking and scratching door - OUT

THAYER

So do I. Hate who I've become.

(EMMA turns around. THAYER lets go of the suitcase)

Sorry about the WD40.

(EMMA starts crawling toward the dining table)

EMMA

(grudgingly)
Sorry I made you angry.

(THAYER helps EMMA stand)

THAYER

"For every minute you remain angry you give up 60 seconds of peace of mind."

EMMA

Which is code for ...

THAYER

I'm sorry I broke our promise.

EMMA

Me, too.

THAYER

(holding out his pinkie)
I will never, ever leave you in anger -

(EMMA and THAYER hook their pinkies)

EMMA and THAYER

- no matter how crazy you drive me. Deal?

(THEY shake)

Deal.

SOUND CUE: Poppy whimpers

(THAYER hands EMMA her cane - helps HER to the couch)

EMMA

You better get going.

THAYER

I don't think so.

EMMA

Oh, Thayer, no ... I'm fine - really.

THAYER

When I was talking to Noel he said something about how well we nap together in Salinas and, it's true - we do. And that made me think of you and your body going your separate ways and what it must be like to be losing your life long friend. And when I saw you just now I realized how frightened I am of losing my life long friend so I nap when I'm in Salinas ... because in my dreams you aren't sick so today never comes.

(THAYER gets out his cell - dials)

EMMA

He's a good man, Thayer.

(THAYER puts his index finger to his lips)

THAYER

My decision, remember?

EMMA

I could reach a plateau. This could drag on for years.

THAYER

Then it drags on for years.

(NOEL (OS) picks up THAYER's call)

Noel ... go on ahead.

(Listening)

I don't think so. I'll call you later.

(Listening)

I have no idea and I know that drives you crazy and I don't know when I'll ever have an idea so you better ... go on ... because ...

(Listening)

I love that about you, Noel. And I always will.

(Listening)

She sends hers, too.

(Pause)

Noel?

(to EMMA)

He hung up.

SOUND CUE: Poppy whines

SOUND CUE: Poppy scratches door

EMMA

Will you let her out?

(THAYER opens the bedroom door)

THAYER

Come on, Poppy. Don't you want to come out? What's the matter?
Oh ...

(THAYER disappears into the room then returns leaving
the door open)

Her chew toy got jammed between the wall and the radiator.

(THAYER sits next to EMMA)

And we thought she wanted to be with us.

(Silence)

EMMA

I hate this, Thayer.

(THAYER puts his arm around EMMA)

THAYER

"The first key to purposeful living is to accept the responsibility of your mission. When you agree "yes" to the calling then you ask God "Why?""

EMMA

Who said that?

THAYER

It's from a book of quotes you gave me Christmases ago.

EMMA

Say it again. The acceptance part.

LIGHT CUE: Slow fade

THAYER

"The first key to purposeful living is to accept the responsibility of your mission. When you agree "yes" to the calling –

EMMA AND THAYER

- then you ask God "Why?""

(EMMA and THAYER sit in silence as POPPY saunters into the living room with her chew toy)

LIGHT CUE: Lights OUT

THE END